Rugby Union Heineken Cup semi-final: Bath 20 Pau 14

Battling Bath's final blessing

Eddie Butler at the Recreation Ground

THERE remains something endearingly old-fashioned about Bath. Having conceded 50 points in the domestic league two weeks ago, they regrouped last Saturday according to ancient ways and drew on their family spirit to see off the French challenge and make it to the European Cup final.

It was all very traditional and probably makes them the underdogs for the big clash at the end of January in Bordeaux where they will meet Brive. Their French opponents beat Toulouse by virtue of scoring more tries when their semi-final in Toulouse finished tied at 22-22 after extra time.

Digging deep into the reserves is a Bath speciality. Another trick is to unleash Mike Catt at club level. Whatever his vacillations on the international stage, he can do little wrong in this patch of the West Country.

Last Saturday he put in a highly controlled, imaginative and brave display from his preferred position at outside-half. Catt tackled magnificently, especially in the last quarter. He ran on to the ball to take it flat from scrum-half Andy Nicol, and when Pau rushed up to greet this daring offensive strategy, he kicked behind them and gave then something else to think about.

The French team arrived rated third among the qualifiers for the last four. Pau were immensely solid up front, determined from first minute to last, but they never threatened to cut loose. They have a reputation for being ill-disciplined, but apart from some understandable tension in the final quarter and one other incident when Phil de Glanville was tumble-dried out of a ruck, it was game well policed by the players and well controlled by the referee. Anyway, a match without De Glanville having stitches would be an anomaly.

If the tie never reached great heights it was hard-fought throughout. Among the forwards, Dan Lyle, the American, had yet another outstanding afternoon: he has the best pair of hands in English rugby. Nigel Redman was also, for one of the game's smaller second-rows, immense at the line-out and in the tackle; Victor Ubogu had his moments, too. With the score 3-3, thanks to a penalty apiece by David Aucagne and Jon Callard, he was able to score the first try of the game.

Bath went left from a clean line-out win, and set up a ruck. They switched to the right, where a posse of forwards was lurking out wide. De Glanville, who sometimes hesitated before delivery, had enough faith in Lyle to give him a pass. His No 8 did not let the centre down, for he drew the defence into the tackle and slipped a pass to Ubogu, who scored in the same corner where he killed off Cardiff's hopes in the quarter-final.

The remaining 10 minutes of the first half contained only three more penalties, two by Aucagne, to leave Pau only two points adrift at the interval.

The second half saw an increase in the frenzy of the forward exchanges. At the ruck, Pau started to kill the ball, and gave away the two penalties which allowed Callard to extend Bath's lead to eight points.

But then Ubogu had another moment. He suffered a nick to his head and was standing having treatment while his coach, Andy Robinson, screamed at him to rejoin the action. Pau took advantage of his absence to drive from a line-out, release the back, and send Philippe Bernat-Salles over in the corner. Ubogu, duly bandaged, rejoined to make a tackle, but too late.

With three points in it, the stage seemed set for an electric last quarter. But Pau continued to infringe as the Bath grip tightened up front. Another Callard penalty made it 20-14. Thereafter, Bath remained in control, but there was one incident that might have turned things the other way.

As Bernat-Salles chased a kick ahead, Adedayo Adebayo tugged his shirt, an affront that not only went unpunished but was compounded a minute later when Bath's wing felled the same player with a clumsy late tackle which also left the referee unmoved. My, how the French moaned. But in reality they did not deserve to win.

Whatever their faults in domestic rugby, whatever the parlous state of their long-term finances, Bath remain a mighty force in the land. They still know what to do when it comes to the really big games. Last Sunday they gave themselves the opportunity to test their skill and resolve on the biggest stage of all.

Cryptic crossword by Gemini

Across

1 One taking quiet breaks repairs to the hills (7)
5 The opposer's false move (7)
10 Doctor leaving the Capital by barge (4)
11 An equivalent foreign decoration (10)
12 Bare, or half-bare, calf (6)
13 Javelin thrower in the field (8)
14 Show utter arrogance towards the US (9)
16 Top English novelist (5)
17 Saint affected by mischief (5)
19 A way to reproduce from the original design (9)
23 Lied most appropriate for Fischer-Dieskau, perhaps (8)
24 European buff (6)
26 Party-pooper goes off with the booze (10)
27 With silly old Lady's capital, a toy boy is made (4)
28 Tree in make-up parted curtains and came on stage (7)
29 Butter-cloth (7)

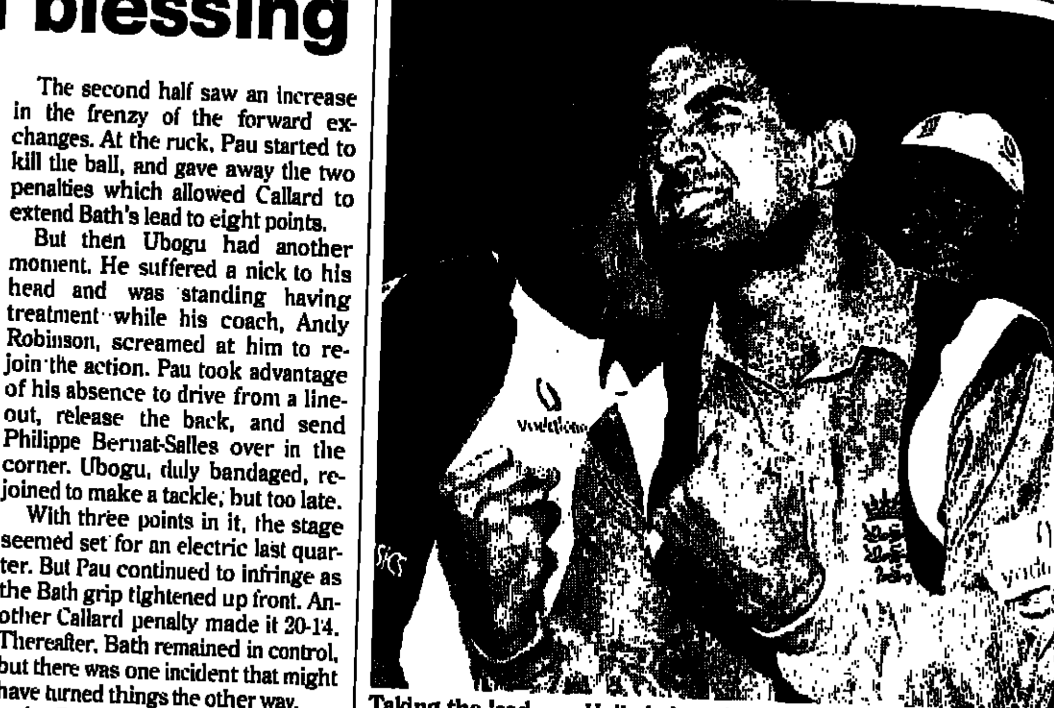
Down

2 Property without an heir? That may be the case (7)
3 Look for signs of Spring (5)
4 Jams/preserves (7)
6 He appears, in standing, to have fully endorsed party policy (6)
7 Enclose intimate letters from this writer (3-6)
8 Placed second — that's a disappointment (7)
9 Conditions are treacherous — take that into account (13)
15 Note: promise is broken to buy time (9)
18 Reduce the price of each work by a pound (7)
20 Head with many a twisted plait (7)
21 One's firmness of purpose is about to crack (7)
22 The first edition of this paper (6)
25 City refuge is full (5)

Last week's solution

REDLETTER BEANO
A A A I I A D V
DEPARTMENTSTORE
O P L E G S P R
NILE AFFECTED
E G S I T E R
ENDORPHIN HYDRA
G E O G O W
GENIE PREORDAIN
S I N S R N P
HIGHBROW LAMA
E H E I C O T N
LATERALTHINKING
L I E E I C T S
SWEET DECREMENT

Cricket Champions Cup final: England v W Indies



Taking the lead . . . Holly brings Christmas cheer PHOTO: ANWAR

England's desert stormers

Mike Selvey in Sharjah

ENGLAND went to the Middle East in hope and returned as winners. Their victory by three wickets in the frenetic atmosphere under Sharjah's lights was a triumph in adversity, a tribute to the strength in depth and indomitable spirit of Adam Hollioake's charges.

Set a target of 236 to win the Champions Cup, England appeared to have blown their chances at 165 for six with nine overs left. What followed was perhaps the finest recovery ever staged by an England side in this form of the game.

A seventh-wicket partnership masterminded by the cool professionalism of Graham Thorpe and abetted by Matthew Fleming produced 70 runs in seven high-octane overs to bring home a spangly trophy, and £35,000 to boot, with 11 balls to spare.

Fleming's 34 runs from 27 balls, an innings of calculated hitting, had been crucial, as had Alec Stewart's 51 at the start. Thorpe's unbeaten 66 from 74 balls was the innings of an all-round batsman of world stature and earned the man of the match award.

Well as England recovered, West Indies will rue the return to the profligate old ways that have lost them so many limited-overs matches in the past. To concede 30 extras in any game, let alone a relatively low-scoring one, betrays a lack of professionalism, and hindsight will tell them that this lost them the game.

West Indies made 235 for seven, with an opening stand of 97 in 22 overs between Stuart Williams (55) and Shivnarine Chanderpaul (77). A most significant contribution also came from Phil Simmons who made 39 from 37 balls and added an unbroken 35 in the last four overs with the wicketkeeper David Williams.

After such a start West Indies might have run away with the match but in the 14th over, when they were 68 for no wicket, Hollioake brought Mark Ealham on to bounce along like a ball of tumbleweed in a spaghetti Western.

Until Simmons and David Williams broke out, the England bowlers turned the screw in a manner that would have sent Torquemada emerald with envy. On a slow, low wicket ideal for England, with taking pace off the ball more potent than putting pace on it, Ealham thrived and made himself the bowler of the tournament, conceding an average of 3.4 runs per over and only 45 in total from his last 18 overs.

There was first-rate support too from Croft's off-spin, from Hollioake himself and Fleming, through the virtue of bowling wicket to wicket and thus allowing batsmen no freedom to swing their arms.

Simmons's timely innings hauled West Indies to a reasonable total but until then the only innings of substance had come from Stuart Williams and Chanderpaul, who underpinned things. With two half-centuries, and a hundred against India, Williams compiled 259 runs — more than any other player in the tournament.

The England outcricket, with the exception of a sharp caught-and-bowled chance to Hollioake offered by Chanderpaul when he had made 26, was faultless and at times inspirational. A good example was Stewart's slick stumping of Brian Lara.

Fleming's full-length dive and off-balance double-topper from backward point to dispose of Chanderpaul, and Croft's direct hit to run out Franklyn Rose, were proof positive that hours of practice really do pay off.

Later, Fleming produced a brace of leg-cutters in the space of three balls to strike the back legs of Carl Hooper, then Roland Holder, and win good lbw decisions.

Scores: West Indies 235 for 7 in 50 overs; England 239 for 7 in 48.1 overs

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Algerian slaughter claims 1,000 lives

David Hirst and agencies

THE massacre of more than 400 people in a remote mountainous region west of Algiers — and the deaths of 200 more in four separate attacks near the capital — is the latest indication that the country's 130,000-strong army is, if anything, losing ground against suspected Islamist militants in a conflict estimated to have cost 75,000 lives since 1992.

At least 1,000 people have died in the past two weeks, but the biggest massacre in Algeria's six-year civil war came last week as the villagers broke fast on the first evening of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Muslim year.

Although the full horror of the attack only became known last weekend, the slaughter began just after nightfall on Tuesday last week, when the assailants, armed with axes, knives, hoes and shovels, descended on four remote hamlets around the town of Relizane.

Survivors who fled into the darkness described how the attackers hurled infants against the walls of houses to kill them. They methodically cut throats, decapitated and disembowelled, wholly confident, it seemed, that they would not be impeded in their grisly handiwork. One, with a walkie-talkie, was overheard saying: "We're almost done here."

One survivor, Ali B, in his 50s, stammered as he told what had happened. "They cut the throats of all my family. Only my baby escaped the massacre, miraculously, I don't know how . . . There were many of them, I couldn't count them, armed with knives, axes . . . They asked me for money, then provoked my wife and when I intervened they jumped on me and hit me with an axe. "Hours afterwards, when I woke, I found all my family bathing in a sea of blood . . ."

One eyewitness, Hadj Muhammad, whose family was wiped out, said he had dragged 80 corpses from two houses. The attackers had apparently herded their victims together before killing them.

"I was trampled all over before getting an axe blow in the stomach. I don't know how I survived," said one 16-year-old girl.

Another girl had her breasts cut off. A dozen or so others were reported to have been abducted. It is apparently the terrorists' practice to take young women as "sex slaves" and to kill them later.

At a hospital in the west Algerian town of Oued Rhiou, a woman who survived by hiding in an alcove cried out: "They [the attackers] are not human. How can you explain the head of a baby of six months being crushed and the body being trampled on?"

One newspaper, the daily L'Authentique, carried the headline: We Know Our Executioners. The paper quoted residents saying that at least some of the militants were former neighbours who wanted to seize their property by killing them.

But other papers saw the killings as a diversionary move by the Armed Islamic Group, the dissident wing of the Islamist opposition movement — known by its French initials GIA — to widen the conflict and draw more military forces away from the Algiers region.

Before last weekend's editions of the Algerian newspapers, the authorities had spoken of 78 killed. Even last Sunday Algeria's interior minister, Mustapha Benmansour, attending a meeting in Tunis, repeated the officially announced toll of 78 dead, 73 wounded. "It's totally false," he said of the 412-death toll.

On Tuesday the Algerian newspaper La Tribune reported that several hundred civilians were burnt alive and 117 had their throats cut in two new attacks in western Algeria. It said there were no survivors in the village of Had Chekala in the western Relizane province, which was razed in an attack overnight on Sunday-Monday.

La Tribune said the other massacre, in which it reported that at least 117 people died, took place on Saturday night at Remka, also in Relizane province, which lies about 250km west of Algiers.

There was no official or independent confirmation of either reported incident.

The mainstream Islamist organisation, the relatively moderate Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), denounced the carnage as "a crime against humanity", but said that the regime itself was in one way or another responsible for these massacres, through its inability to protect citizens, its setting of one segment of the people against another and "its infiltration of and exploitation of armed groups [the GIA] for its vile purposes".

The regime also came in for strong criticism from anti-Islamist newspapers such as al-Watan, which said that Algeria now faces "a genocide of its people".

An upsurge of terrorist violence in Ramadan has become a tradition. It usually follows a pattern. Last year it was typified by a spate of deadly car-bombs in Algiers. This year the epicentre of violence has moved to western regions that have hitherto been relatively unscathed. This was foreshadowed by GIA leaflets warning: "We shall come here soon; we breakfasted in Algiers, we shall sup in Oran."

The regime, apparently desperate to sustain its claim to be breaking the back of the terror, contends that the new outbreak in the west is a sign of the terrorists' weakness. They have, it argues, been forced to take refuge there after their setbacks in the Mitidja, the plain around Algiers, recently the GIA's main stronghold and theatre of operations.

According to the regime, they are caught up in the "suicidal logic" of taking revenge on defenceless villages, far from the nearest army positions, in mountainous wooded regions that are ideal guerrilla country.

The regime's critics contend that the new outbreak shows that the army is increasingly outmanned and outmanoeuvred. The growing reliance on "self-defence" units seems to be at least implicit admission of this.

Visiting the site of a recent massacre, General Kamel Abderrahmane, commander of the western region, said: "The state cannot put a soldier in front of every house." He told the people to "arm themselves individually, or band together and arm their young men — or clear out and go to the towns".

● France has voiced support for a German proposal that the European Union leadership consider ways of helping to end the violence in Algeria.

However, for the most part, European governments have publicly voiced little concern for the violence across the Mediterranean. Algeria is the world's eighth largest supplier of natural gas, and western European governments appear reluctant to make any moves that could disrupt economic relations with Algeria.

Algerian women grieve at the deaths of relatives in a conflict that has claimed 75,000 lives in six years

Moi's rigged victory offers little hope to Kenya

Peter Hillmore in Nairobi

LORRYLOADS of soldiers cruised through Nairobi last weekend, bumping across huge potholes in the shanty town that now passes for the capital of Kenya. The soldiers were ominously reminding voters that this is a country where the bullet and the ballot go together.

Daniel arap Moi, who was sworn in on Monday for his fifth term as president, had won the election whether people liked it or not. The opposition had questioned the validity and manner of his victory, and the troops were one way of answering them. The opposition may be good at raising serious questions, but is hopeless at providing serious answers. It could not unite to fight Mr Moi during the election and couldn't unite afterwards to challenge his crooked victory.

Everyone knows the election was rigged. Even Mr Moi himself declared that the vote was rigged. Kanu, Kenya's ruling party, is now denying it, even though the newspaper owned by the president's son ran the story under the uncompromising headline, "They're Rigging Against Me".

Mr Moi, aged 73, is among the last of Africa's old post-colonial dictators. Vice-president to Jomo Kenyatta from 1966 and president since 1978, it was inevitable that he wouldn't give up without an unfair fight.

"Of course, I'm not surprised that Moi won," said Richard Leakey, secretary-general of the Safina party, which won three seats. "Only Moi as the incumbent could have won. He had delayed election reforms, like giving the opposition proper access to radio and television, so that they had no time to work and give the opposition a chance."

The international community does not appear to want to argue with Mr Moi's own analysis of rigging. It is already beginning to overlook the skulduggery in the interests of stability. There were observers, uninvited by the Kenyan government, from 14 countries monitoring the election. By the end of last week a senior member of the observers' group was beginning to play down the election chaos.

But the observer who went to the Mathioya constituency will have seen a candidate's car burnt by the ruling party's bodyguards on election day and will have been told that the cost of buying a vote worked out on average at 60 Kenyan shillings ($1) a vote.

After nearly 20 years of Mr Moi, Kenya is now in a perilous and unstable state. The president cannot stand again, and some observers predict chaos as his underlings vie to be his chosen successor.

The huge disparity of votes that candidates got in different regions demonstrated to no one's surprise that votes were mostly cast on tribal, rather than party, allegiances.

Kenya still has no answers to its major social problems. Nairobi is becoming deserted as companies find it too run-down and dangerous. There is inflation and an abundance of corruption. Tourism is falling because of tribal warfare on the coast and confusion inland.

Kenya is not stable, and the rigged election of Mr Moi, the man who has impoverished his country and enriched himself, only makes it less so for the next five years. — *The Observer*

Austria	AS30	Malta	60c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,600	Switzerland	SF 3.80

Biotech crumbs from the rich man's table

THERE was a joyous logic to Paul Bryan's belief that we should celebrate biotechnology as it will inevitably liberate poor farmers in the developing world from the back-breaking drudgery of rural existence (December 28). Then they can all "take advantage of the infinitely more rewarding pleasures of urbanisation".

All the evidence we have points in a different direction. Increasing the technology involved in food production has never benefited the developing world as it has the richer nations. Poor farmers will increasingly find themselves tied to expensive seed stock, fertilisers and pesticides which are required by the new biotechnologies. The drive for this revolution comes from greedy multinational corporations, and no one else.

High-technology food production has all too often backfired — mad cow disease being the most recent example. The developing world has witnessed many such disasters as nature turns up surprises that the technologists had not predicted. The cost to these people is their livelihood and their health.

Sustainable agriculture that will meet the real needs of the world's poorest does indeed require a revolution. But the revolution would be to low-technology, low-input practices and products suited to local resources and tastes, and not those of the corporate dining table.
Jolyon Rose,
London

BIOTECHNOLOGY offers rich promise for the future (A $400 billion gamble with world's food, December 21). At present it is only able to manipulate single-gene characteristics. However, most important agronomic characteristics are multi-gene characteristics. These include drought tolerance, yield potential, and many others that genetic engineering should be able to manipulate in the future. With scientific advancement of biotechnology it will, for example, be possible to grow a corn crop with less water than the crop requires today. Such advances portend solutions to feeding a growing population in a hungry world.

Ascribing a leading role to biotechnology in the continued poverty of developing countries clouds the real issues that restrict rural development in poor countries. Government policies and overall business conditions have far more influence on rural well-being than the advent of biotechnology. In many parts of the world farmers live at a subsistence level because they cannot do any better. Their standard of living has nothing to do with biotechnology. Rather, they have little access to farm credit in order to finance the purchases of fertilisers, high-quality seed, and other inputs that would increase output and productivity. Government policies also affect access to water for irrigation, the choice of crops to grow, prices for farm output, access to markets, and much more.

Viewing biotechnology as a nefarious tool that will increase United States dominance of world food supplies and will put consumers at risk would seem to ignore the basic economics of world trade and the processes used internationally and by each nation to assure food safety.
Juliet A Zavon,
Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

JOHN VIDAL and Mark Milner rightly focus on the economic gains of a few companies, while the rest of us pay. However, in referring to the corporate "vision of more productive crops needing fewer pesticides" they miss the point. Herbicide and pesticide resistance is built into plants to allow the application of more, not less, chemicals without the risk of crop damage. Few companies have a vision of reducing demand for their products.
Peter Royce,
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Australia's lurch to the right

JOHN WALSH (Letter from Melbourne, December 14) believes that "the rise of Pauline Hanson and her . . . One Nation party has been the least appetising feature of recent Australian politics". Hardly. It has been frightening, but what's more frightening is the scale of ignorance that has made it possible, and the reactionary cavilling of a national government that has given Ms Hanson tacit permission to carry on like a half-articulate antipodean version of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Now, not surprisingly, her travelling circus is falling apart; while John Howard's government remains in office, the reactionary right scarcely needs her. This government is nervous and grudging on multiculturalism; deaf and blind on social justice; mean, fearful and hostile on race relations; wilfully ignorant of national history; stupid enough to disinvest in education; short-sighted and inhumane enough to retreat on international issues of environmental protection and human rights.

The reasons why anyone might (still) want to become an Australian citizen lie with policies and institutions that have been savaged but not quite destroyed: public education, the social welfare safety net, public broadcasting as an alternative to narrow, monopolised media industries; and, as Mr Walsh describes, the real benefits of established multiculturalism.

It's nice that Mr Walsh came on board — we need all the talent we can get — but let him not be misguided into demonising Ms Hanson. That mistakes the symptom for the disease. Nor should he consign Aboriginal reconciliation to a postscript; it is the ethical centre for our future.
Sylvia Lawson,
Sydney, Australia

CHRISTOPHER ZINN'S "Aborigines get no official apology" (December 28) air-brushes the stolen children issue. Thousands of mixed-race children were abducted from Aboriginal parents. The purpose was not to "improve their health care and education", of which they received little in the dismal institutions set up for them, but rather to speed the depletion of Aboriginal culture, whose extinction was expressly desired by some of the administrators.

Many were farmed out to whites as virtual slave labour. Parents and children were refused any information of the others' fates. The Human Rights Commission report described as "genocidal" a programme so cruel and tragic that even rightwing state governments have offered official apologies.

It is a mark of the moral stature of the prime minister, John Howard, that he appears to regard a refusal to officially apologise, like his resistance to greenhouse gas reduction, as a test of manly character.
John Hayward,
Weegena, Tasmania, Australia

A defensive state of mind

MARTIN WOOLLACOTT rightly exposes the pretence of a European foreign and defence policy as a fiction (Europe still clings to Uncle Sam's coat-tails, December 21). However, it seems odd that he ignores the real reason for this.

Only fully fledged states can be expected to have coherent policies in these areas. As long as the leaders of the European Union member states refuse to surrender sovereign powers in these and other notionally EU or shared areas to an elected EU executive, it is obvious that there will be no real European external policy.

The heads of government, no matter how ostensibly attached to the European ideal, prefer to be big fish in small to middling ponds, rather than the equivalent of United States state governors, Canadian or Australia premiers, etc. in a true European federation. They are not about to turn over a new leaf, hand over their armed forces and foreign affairs to a democratic confederal government and cultivate their vestigial vineyards untroubled by the weighty perks and responsibilities of the heads of sovereign governments.

In short, you can't achieve a European defence and foreign policy in a meaningful sense without a true democratic European government. That's the last thing national politicians in power want. In such a situation of course the US will determine the outcome more often as not. Foreign and defence policy by a committee of 15 just won't work.
Nigel Tappin,
Dwight, Ontario, Canada

Liberal amount of breast bleating

THAT'S it, I can no longer read the Washington Post pages in the Guardian Weekly. The op-ed piece by Charles Krauthammer is the final straw (Beware the glitter of a golden era, December 28). Even with his not-ironic tone and his final tag, the breast-beating is too much. The left-liberal posturing of Post writers has become increasingly unbearable as their reporting and opinions square only with a narrow reality described by the propagandists of successive United States administrations and believed by those who directly benefit and profit.

The piece in the same issue by William Drozdiak (It's showtime, NBA style, on Bosnian TV stations), which can only be read as ironic, continues the tone of hollow gravitas that invokes the US as the benevolent and benign dispenser of (a certain) democracy set upon by an ungrateful world and made me reject my breakfast for the final time.

I'm asking the editor if I may be refunded, say, 20 cents from my cover price if I return the Post unread. Better still, seeing we already have another Western perspective in Le Monde, could we have a supplement from an Arab daily to at least offset the saccharine bleatings of well-fed Washington "liberals"?
Adam Bartlett,
Bangalow, NSW, Australia

Briefly

CAN I be alone in making a connection between two news items by Stephen Bates? On November 30 he wrote, "The subsidies to Greek and Italian tobacco farmers are also queried. They receive $1.2 billion . . . for producing their low grade crop." Then on December 14, "Tobacco advertising and sponsorship will be banned in European states within nine years, a historic meeting of health ministers in Brussels decided last week." How long are we going to go on subsidising the production of a substance whose advertising will soon be completely banned, and whose health effects cost the European Union states many times the amount of subsidies?
Don Montague,
Eymet, France

I ENJOYED your article on Barbara Cassini (November 3). I was struck by the description of her "balance" between work and motherhood. For many working women the idea of tiptoeing out of the house before the children are awake, then returning at bedtime, does not provide a satisfying or feasible model. I would hope sincerely that neither women nor societies be pushed in the direction that this one successful executive has chosen.
Tanya Furman,
Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

ANY ordinary suspect with a prima facie case of a £31 million fraud against them would have had their assets frozen before their first court appearance, and their passport withdrawn thereafter, but not Lady Porter (December 28). It will be interesting to see whether the Home Secretary now takes steps to have her extradited on charges of perjury, so that, if found guilty, she can be given a suitably long sentence, plus a fine equal to any unpaid surcharge and all the associated costs.
Michael Martin,
Liverpool, Merseyside

MICHAEL BILLINGTON on Peter Brook on Beckett: "Beckett forges his merciless 'no' out of a longing for a 'yes', and so his despair is the negative from which the contour of its opposite can be drawn" (December 14). Brilliantly put? Maybe. To put it less brilliantly: It helps to know that things are as bad as they are.
Ford Aust,
Geelong, Victoria, Australia

IF NOTHING else, the Kyoto conference on climate change at least proved how miserably true is the old saw that everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.
Siria Mitchell,
Tartu, Estonia

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Netanyahu survives as coalition crumbles

David Sharrock in Jerusalem

BINYAMIN NETANYAHU survived a crucial vote in the Israeli parliament on Monday, the first test of his depleted coalition since the resignation of the foreign minister, David Levy, plunged the government into crisis.

The prime minister won the Knesset vote on his budget by a comfortable margin of 58-52, with only one abstention from his party's backbenchers. The budget — and its large handouts to the ultra-Orthodox and Jewish settlers — was a key factor in Mr Levy's resignation last Sunday.

Making good on his sixth resignation threat in 19 months, Mr Levy bitterly denounced the prime minister for foot-dragging on peace and ignoring the mounting problems of Israel's poor.

Mr Netanyahu had been struggling since last week to find a way to keep him on side. Following Mr Levy's departure, Mr Netanyahu tried desperately to prevent the collapse of his coalition government. He said that even without Mr Levy's support his coalition would remain stable. But in a veiled warning he said that the public should not repeat the "dreadful mistake" it made in 1992 by electing a leftwing Labour government.

Mr Levy's resignation threatens to further stall American-led attempts to revive the Middle East peace process, and exposes Mr Netanyahu and his rightwing Likud party to even greater pressure from the Jewish settler groups and ultra-Orthodox parties upon whose support he depends.

Mr Levy told reporters that he was no longer prepared to soldier on alone in the cabinet with efforts to preserve the peace process. "One cannot force a policy which the majority of the government does not want," he said. "I'm through with this partnership, I've had it, period."

While the size of the budget vote brought a smile to Mr Netanyahu's face, many politicians believe it will not stay there for long. He faces another confidence motion as early as next week, brought by the leftwing Meretz party.

After that Mr Netanyahu must finally reveal the extent of a promised Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank when he meets President Bill Clinton at the White House later this month. One of his coalition partners has promised to bring him down if he goes ahead with the pull-out, while another has promised to do the same if he does not.

It is just conceivable that having secured cabinet approval for a further troop redeployment, Mr Netanyahu could secure cross-party support in the Knesset and risk angering the far-right parties. But then he faces a new dilemma, the bitter stand-off between Orthodox and secular factions over the conversion law, which would legally define Jews as Orthodox only, excluding Reform and secular Jews.

In spite of the widely held view that he is living on borrowed time, Mr Netanyahu insists there will be no early poll. "I know they're the fashion now and everyone is doing the maths, but . . . this government, this coalition and this prime minister don't work according to regular maths," he said.

Since last April President Clinton has been refusing to see Mr Netanyahu, but the Israeli leader confirmed the forthcoming meeting would go ahead. The United States' special envoy, Dennis Ross, was expected to arrive in Israel on Tuesday.

Ehud Barak, leader of the opposition Labour party, said the government's days were numbered. "It is a plane running out of fuel that is about to crash into the mountainside."

Comment, page 10

Kaunda arrested for 'coup plot'

Agencies in Lusaka

THE FORMER Zambian president, Kenneth Kaunda, arrested on Christmas Day for his alleged role in a failed coup, has yet to be questioned on the matter, his political party said last weekend.

Mr Kaunda, aged 73, was detained under a state of emergency declared after the coup attempt by mutinous soldiers last October. General Malimba Masheke, chairman of Mr Kaunda's United National Independence party, said Mr Kaunda had told party officials that police still have not questioned him on accusations he was involved in the coup attempt, which occurred while he was abroad.

Mr Kaunda led Zambia to independence from Britain in 1964 and ruled for 27 years until he was defeated by President Frederick Chiluba in multi-party elections in 1991.

The United States and Britain, as well as the Commonwealth, have condemned Mr Kaunda's detention. President Chiluba said he would not be dictated to by other governments over Mr Kaunda. But he bowed to pressure last week from the former Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) chairman, Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe, to remove Mr Kaunda from prison and place him under house arrest. The former president has been barred from active politics and from speaking to the press.

Mr Kaunda is challenging his detention in the high court, and was expected to appear in court again this week.

Meanwhile 15 Zambian opposition parties have pulled out of constitutional talks in protest at Mr Kaunda's detention, citing fears for their own safety.

The World Bank postponed indefinitely a donors' meeting to discuss funding to Zambia — scheduled for last month — because of economic and political concerns.

Washington Post, page 13



Relatives of armed prisoners holding more than 600 hostages at a jail in Sorocaba, near São Paulo, protest at the prison gates. The tense three-day standoff came to an end last week as prisoners scaled down their demands, and Brazilian police retook the jail without a shot being fired PHOTO: PAULO WHITAKER

Massacre shakes Mexico government

Phil Gunson in Mexico City

TENSIONS in Chiapas, raised by the Christmas massacre of 45 indigenous peasants by pro-government paramilitaries, grew worse last weekend as the federal army invaded a pro-Zapatista community close to what is considered the guerrillas' headquarters.

And though opposition members applauded the long-awaited removal of the interior minister, Emilio Chuayffet, seen as the architect of a hardline policy in the southern border state, there is mounting concern that his successor — the former agriculture secretary, Francisco Labastida Ochoa — will ignore calls for a more sensitive approach.

In his first statement on Chiapas, the new interior minister said it was "indispensable to prevent the illegal possession, transportation and use of weapons by any group or person . . . While there are armed groups there will be conflict between them."

Such views are consistent with the policy being implemented in Chiapas by the army, whose already overwhelming presence in the state was increased by some 5,000 troops after the massacre on December 22.

Since the "discovery" last week of a small cache of weapons near a pro-Zapatista (EZLN) community — guerrillas say the weapons were planted — the army has sent dozens of troops in armoured cars and other military vehicles to harass the population of La Realidad, where Zapatistas had retreated after the army offensive of February 1995.

The heavily-armed soldiers entered La Realidad last weekend, blocking the roads out of the community. They detained and questioned the inhabitants for several hours, according to reports from the scene.

The army argues that its operations ensure the "strict application" of the federal firearms and explosives law, and are aimed at "guaranteeing security and social tranquillity".

This apparent attempt to portray the EZLN as the equivalent of the pro-government paramilitaries contradicts the letter and the spirit of the 1995 law, which recognises the Zapatistas as partners in a dialogue with the government — a dialogue which, as mediators pointed out last weekend, is suspended but not broken.

Bishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristóbal, chairman of the Chiapas mediation commission (Conai), said it was "worrying that the army, instead of going to the places where the paramilitaries have appeared, is going to the EZLN, an armed group which is engaged in dialogue".

The weekly news magazine Proceso last Sunday published extracts from a 1994 defence ministry document advocating the creation of paramilitary groups. The document describes "the training and support of self-defence groups or other paramilitary organisations" as "the fundamental principle of the mobilisation for military and development operations".

On Monday supporters of the Zapatistas blocked access to the Mexican stock market and occupied two radio stations in Mexico City, witnesses said.

Washington Post, page 13

The Week

RIVAL Somali factions signed a peace agreement in Cairo to end six years of clan warfare and rebuild state institutions. The warlord Hussein Mohamed Aideed and his main rival, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, signed the deal after 40 days of negotiation.

FIVE months after undergoing a showcase trial by his ex-Khmer Rouge followers, Cambodia's ailing former tyrant Pol Pot was reported to have found sanctuary in China. Beijing denied the claim.

A DUAL US-Lithuanian citizen, Valdas Adamkus, aged 71, was elected as president of Lithuania by a narrow margin.

THE appointment of General Le Kha Phieu, a conservative disciplinarian, as the new boss of Vietnam's ruling Communist party has put into question prospects for reform at a time of social unrest and economic hardship.
Le Monde, page 17

INTERIOR ministers from 20 Arab countries agreed in Tunis to increase co-operation to fight "terrorism", a term they generally use to describe Muslim fundamentalist violence.

HONG KONG slaughtered 1.4 million chickens and other poultry to minimise the risk of a "bird flu" virus being transmitted to humans through direct contact with live birds.
Washington Post, page 14

PAYING tribute to the Peace Corps' work, President Clinton proposed to increase by half the number of participants the US sends abroad. He is asking Congress to up the programme's budget to $270 million in 1999, which would take the number of workers to 10,000 by 2000.

RESEARCHERS at the University of Michigan have developed in animals a vaccine against the deadly Ebola virus, the university said.

THE kiwi, symbol of New Zealand around the world, is heading for extinction soon because of habitat loss and a growing number of predators, according to a field study.

EUROPE'S human rights commissioners and judges are being pressed to overturn the landmark legal case that established the right of states to put national security above individual rights after Sweden's government admitted that its sworn evidence to the European Court of Human Rights was a pack of lies.

SEPARATE SKIING accidents claimed the lives of Michael Kennedy, the 39-year-old son of Robert Kennedy, and Sonny Bono, aged 62, a US congressman and former pop musician.

Kurdish exodus rattles Europe

Ian Traynor in Bonn and Helena Smith in Athens

GERMANY reacted on Monday to the plight of Kurdish boat people in the Mediterranean by seeking to lay down the law to southern European countries on immigration. Calls were also made for the suspension of the Schengen regime, which enables passport-free travel among nine European Union countries.

Manfred Kanther, the German interior minister, told Italy and Greece to get tough on immigrants and demanded that the exodus of Kurds from the Middle East be "stamped out".

Gerhard Glogowski, the social democratic interior minister of Lower Saxony, called for the Schengen accords to be shelved unless Italy reversed its policy of offering asylum to Kurdish immigrants.

The EU must form a co-ordinated policy to deal with illegal Kurdish immigrants, the French foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, said in Lisbon. He was speaking ahead of a meeting of EU experts in Brussels this week to discuss the operation of the Schengen regime amid the crisis.

Italy, which said it would grant political asylum to genuine Kurdish immigrants fleeing persecution, has taken in more than 1,200 migrants since last week and is poised to receive many more. EU states, particularly Germany and France, fear they will pour northwards to other Schengen states.

"The EU should do everything possible to have a co-ordinated, homogenous position on this subject," Mr Vedrine told a news conference. "When there is a mass immigration, the principles should be different to those in day-to-day immigration. The principles in this case are that Europe should have the responsibility to control immigrant flows as completely as possible."

France has sent police reinforcements to its border with Italy to prevent Kurds entering the country, and Mr Kanther said police on Germany's southern border were poised to reinforce the frontier at the slightest indication of a migrant surge.

Mr Kanther, while not supporting Mr Glogowski's call to shelve Schengen, outlined measures that would effectively suspend the free-borders regime. "In view of this threatening situation, western Europe must view itself as a security community," he said.

He called on Italy to erect road checkpoints to prevent the immigrants moving north to join the 500,000 Kurds living in Germany, and urged Greece and Turkey to look out for illegal immigrants at ports and ferry terminals.

"All our countries are potential destinations if the beginnings are not stamped out," Mr Kanther said. "Italy and Greece in particular must take much tougher action against illegal immigration."

Thousands of illegal immigrants swamped Greek labour offices on Monday as Athens moved to legalise almost half a million refugees for the first time. The rush came as Greece stepped up patrols in the Aegean amid fears of a mass influx of Kurds from Turkey.

The socialist government said it had sent scores of coastguard officials, armed with assault rifles and trained by the country's special forces, to patrol the seas.

Since the doors were opened to illegal migrants on January 1, more than 20,000 refugees from Europe, Africa and Asia have besieged government offices to apply for work and residence permits. Under the law, immigrants will be granted temporary work permits before being issued with renewable, two-year residence permits.

The government says the move is aimed as much at controlling the economic migrants — who have rapidly boosted Greece's booming black labour market — as it is at providing them with a better life. In recent years, growing numbers, not least from Albania, have been blamed for soaring crime.

"Now that they know there are certain conditions to fulfil if they want to be legal, like living in this country for at least two years, they might think twice before entering it," said an official at the labour ministry. But critics believe the move is another crack in fortress Europe, although Greece is not a member of the Schengen group.

Karim Rezaul, a Bangladeshi aged 36, waiting outside the main Athens labour office, said he had "prayed and wept" for three years for this moment. "I first heard that Greece was thinking of legalising immigrants when I got to Iran three years ago," he said.

Seth Mensah, a Ghanaian aged 34, who was standing behind him in the heaving crowd, said: "I've been working on ships here for seven years. Once I've got real documents in my hands, I'll be able to travel freely across Europe. Europe will just have to accept me."

Le Monde, page 17



A Kurdish boy looks through a fence of a refugee camp in San Foca, southern Italy
PHOTOGRAPH: MARIO LAPORTA

Insurgency looms in Kosovo

Karen Coleman in Pristina

LAST January police came to Alban Neziri's flat in Pristina, the capital of the Serbian province of Kosovo, and arrested him. They then tortured him in a prison cell for four days.

Mr Neziri, aged 23, was one of 19 ethnic Albanians tried in a court in Pristina for terrorist activities. The trial began last October. When the verdict was delivered last month 17 received sentences of up to 20 years. Mr Neziri was one of two released.

He had spent 11 months in prison. A medical student in Pristina, he said the police used torture to force him to sign a false confession saying he was a member of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and had attacked Serb police stations.

Other defendants made similar allegations of torture and false confessions, and their lawyers produced medical evidence that they had been beaten. But it was ignored at the trial.

Local Serb authorities say their courts are balanced, that their police behave fairly and that the "terrorism" of the KLA must be eradicated. "They claim to be some national liberation army, but they are a classical terrorist group," Bosko Drobnjak, secretary of information in Kosovo, said.

The KLA is a shadowy guerrilla group which aims to "liberate" Kosovo from Serbia. So far, KLA activities have been confined mainly to attacks on police stations.

Little is known about its structure, though it appears to be small and still in its infancy, with leaders based abroad, possibly in Switzerland, Germany and Albania. In Kosovo, however, there appear to be many Albanians disaffected with the Serb regime, who may be potential KLA recruits.

About 90 per cent of the population in this southern Serbian province are ethnic Albanians. But they are ruled by Serbs whose authority they refuse to recognise. Kosovo had a measure of autonomy until 1989 when it was removed by Slobodan Milosevic, then Serbia's president.

There have been serious stand-offs between villagers and police. At the same time, the KLA has started emerging from the shadows and making public appearances.

Last November three men claiming to be KLA members appeared at the funeral of Halit Geci, a 52-year-old teacher shot during a police attack on his village. All three wore uniforms. One of them, wearing a mask, told the gathering attended by thousands that the KLA would defend the people.

Martin Woollacott, page 10

Carlos gets life sentence

Jon Henley in Paris

AFTER four hours of deliberation, a Paris jury last month found Carlos the Jackal guilty of murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment for the shooting of two French secret agents and an informant in Paris in 1975.

"*Viva la Revolucion,*" shouted the man who was once the West's most wanted terrorist on hearing the verdict, shaking his fist at the nearly full courtroom before being led away.

The jury of nine civilians and three judges was not persuaded by a last-ditch attempt by the Venezuelan-born terrorist to plead for acquittal.

In a confused tirade, Carlos lashed out at "the State of Israel, the primary terrorist state in history", and "the machinations" of French justice.

Denouncing his trial as "Stalinist" and a sham, he claimed "world Zionism" would bring about "the McDonaldisation of humanity".

"I don't give a damn about the Carlos myth," said Carlos, on the eighth and final day of a trial that at times seemed as anachronistic as the sideburns and bell-bottomed trousers he wore in the few photographs snapped of him during the cold-war peak in the 1970s.

"In 30 years of waging war a lot of blood has been spilled — mine and others'. But we have never killed for money, but for a cause — the liberation of Palestine."

Carlos spoke for nearly four hours before his monologue was halted by Judge Yves Corneloup.

His ever-changing team of lawyers argued equally passionately that Carlos, born Ilich Ramirez Sanchez in Venezuela 48 years ago, should be cleared.

The evidence against him had been fabricated and prosecution witnesses were not credible, they claimed. They pointed out that Carlos would remain in jail whatever the verdict.

Blamed rightly or wrongly for more than 80 deaths and hundreds of injuries around the world during the 1970s and early 1980s, Carlos is also under investigation in France for a series of bomb attacks between 1974 and 1982 that killed 17 people.

Captured by French agents in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, on August 14, 1994, Carlos was smuggled to Paris and has spent the past three years in solitary confinement.

New rouble fails to shift sceptics

James Meek in Moscow

AT THE climax of a heavily advertised campaign, the Russian government brought down the curtain on a century of ruined currencies and introduced a new rouble as a symbol of the country's new-found financial stability on January 1.

It is intended as a psychological boost to Russians, a return to sanity after the madness of hyperinflation in the early 1990s. The currency will have three noughts lopped off: 1 million roubles, worth just over $160, will be redesignated 1,000 roubles.

"Trillion" will cease to be part of the everyday language of accountancy and the crumpled and despised 1,000-rouble note will be replaced by a shiny 1-rouble coin. The long-lost kopeck, the Russian penny, will return.

"We're drawing a line under the period of high inflation," said Lev Nitko of the Russian central bank. "In other words it's evidence that the economy has moved into a new period of stability."

But to sceptical Russians stability is just economic disaster institutionalised. It is feared that the new rouble will lead to higher prices and more upheaval. Memories are still fresh of the deliberate inflation surge of 1992, which wiped out the life savings of millions; the confiscatory currency reform of 1993, which led to panic and prompted the prime minister, Victor Chernomyrdin, to say in apology: "We wanted things to be better, and they turned out as usual"; and the pyramid schemes of 1994.

In the later Soviet era, the country was awash with cash but there was nothing to spend it on.

Surveys show that a third of Russians do not trust the government to carry out the currency reform without cheating them in some way. Mr Nitko said the number of sceptics had halved since summer. He admitted that there had been a shift of money from rouble savings accounts into hard currency last year, but said this had been reversed.

Conscious of its bad reputation and of the consequences of failure, the bank has gone to great lengths to reassure the people. Pensioners have been recruited to appear in television adverts to say how relaxed they feel about the vanishing zeroes.

As with the successful recent redenominations in Poland and Ukraine, the old and the new currencies will circulate side by side for a year. Old banknotes will be freely exchangeable for a further three years. The new banknotes even look exactly like the old, apart from the missing noughts.

But there is another, more worrying group of cynics who argue that the rouble remains in danger, despite the technical nature of the reform.

The flight of foreign capital from Russia which followed the Asian financial earthquake is not over and with Western investors in retreat from wild-frontier markets, will not be replaced quickly. The IMF is running short of money and patience for a new Russian rescue mission and next year's promised recovery now looks doubtful.

All this makes a volatile background for any currency reform, particularly when the one factor which could tip the rouble over the edge is a stampede into dollars by panicking Russian savers.

Silent widow dons Gandhi mantle

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi

INDIA'S Sonia Gandhi — described as the Sphinx or the Enigma for her all-enveloping silence — last week gave in to the unabashed begging of a Congress party in its death throes to announce that she would campaign in the forthcoming elections.

Mrs Gandhi's appearance during campaigning for polls that take place in late February and early March will end the seclusion to which she has clung since the assassination of her husband, Rajiv Gandhi.

Gandhi, blown up by a Tamil suicide bomber in 1991, was the last member of India's top political dynasty to govern, and the party fears it can never return to the glories of the past without an heir apparent.

The participation of Gandhi's Italian-born widow — her first foray into active politics — is seen as the last chance to hold together an organisation disheartened by defections.

Mrs Gandhi's rare statement last week acknowledged the depths of the disintegration of the Congress party. "A large number of Congress workers from all over the country have requested Mrs Sonia Gandhi to take active interest in the affairs of the Congress party which is at the moment passing through a very crucial phase," the curt message from V. George, her secretary, said.

Although she has commanded the loyalties of veteran Congress leaders since her husband's death, Mrs Gandhi famously abhors politics. Now aged 51, she has spent the past six years presiding over wealthy foundations dedicated to the memory of Rajiv and his mother Indira. But she has made a habit of having Congress leaders to tea, and her power rests in part on the ability of her courtiers to interpret her silence.

Her entry is an acknowledgement that this ballot — forced on a reluctant electorate by the Congress party's withdrawal of support from the United Front coalition government — was engineered either at her behest or in a misguided attempt to win her favour.

The party pulled the plug on the 18-month-old government in November, claiming it could not support a coalition which included a Tamil party linked — albeit tenuously — by a judicial inquiry to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.

Mrs Gandhi was further embarrassed last month when her discreet intervention to stop a breakaway party in West Bengal failed. Congress has been shaken by recent defections in at least six states, and the rebels have been scathing about the performance of the party's octogenarian leader, Sitaram Kesri.

Congress greeted Mrs Gandhi's entry with glee, insisting that the former prime minister's widow, who speaks Hindi and wears saris with aplomb, possesses enough of the family charisma to ward off an electoral disaster expected to be even worse than its historic rout of 1996. With Mrs Gandhi at the hustings, party leaders argued they could even hold their own against the rightwing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Commentators say Mrs Gandhi's continued involvement in politics owes as much to her desire to maintain the political clout that could avoid full exposure of the affair as to a sense of duty. However, with her daughter Priyanka recently married, and her son Rahul abroad, there were no other takers for the family legacy.

Pakistan PM tightens grip on country

Richard Galpin in Islamabad

THE prime minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, strengthened his grip on power last week when his nominee in the presidential election won by a record margin.

Rafiq Tarar, a senator of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League and former Supreme Court judge, swept the polls with 642 of the 766 votes cast by the national parliament in Islamabad and the four provincial assemblies. His majority is the largest since military rule ended 11 years ago.

Opposition politicians have accused Mr Tarar of being the prime minister's puppet, while human rights groups have criticised what they say are his orthodox Islamic views — particularly on women and minorities.

The election was called after the resignation of the former president, Farooq Leghari, at the height of a constitutional crisis that paralysed the country. Mr Leghari had become entangled in the escalating conflict between the government and judiciary, which at one stage looked as if it would undermine Mr Sharif's government and lead to a resumption of military rule.

But with Mr Tarar's victory, the prime minister has staged a remarkable recovery. He has faced down what he saw as challenges to his power from the judiciary and the former president, and seen off his main opponents — replacing the chief justice, the president, and the acting chief election commissioner.

A senior government minister said Mr Tarar's election would put an end to political unrest in the country. "He received the votes not only of Muslim League politicians but also of our allies and others which shows our majority has become more stable," said the finance minister, Sartaj Aziz.

Mr Sharif is now in an extremely powerful position. Reforms introduced last year removed the president's power to dismiss governments, and both the prime minister and Mr Tarar have pledged to introduce further constitutional reforms.

Opposition politicians say the country is being run by an elected dictatorship. "Nawaz Sharif wants one-party rule, he wants everyone on his side," said Ahmed Mukhtar, secretary-general of the Pakistan People's Party. "With his mandate he is trying to bulldoze everything."

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Clinton claims credit for welfare reform



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

IN A MANNER that admits of no serious argument, Bill Clinton has taken to telling audiences that "welfare reform works". The wholly intended implication of this certainty is that Franklin Roosevelt's "old" American welfare state based on automatic entitlement is now both dead and indefensible. And the corollary is that the new system based on stick-and-carrot welfare-to-work incentives is now both a fact of life and morally preferable.

Like all politicians' certainties, Clinton's claims about United States welfare reform are an oversimplification. Yet at the end of the first full year of America's "new welfare", the preliminary results are indisputably encouraging for the president, even though political glibness tends to obscure many real and continuing problems.

The first and most obvious thing to say about Clinton's welfare reform is that it has succeeded in reversing the steady rise in the numbers of benefits claimants. This rise had continued over decades, whether economic times were good or bad. From fewer than 1 million families on welfare in 1960, the rolls swelled rapidly during the early 1970s, levelled off at around 3.5 million welfare families throughout most of the 1980s, and then climbed steadily again in the recession at the start of this decade. In 1994, the trend peaked at just over 5 million families — or around 14 million welfare recipients, when both adults and children are included.

Yet since 1994, that long-term trend has been reversed. The rolls fell by 9 per cent in 1995, by 11 per cent in 1996 and by an estimated 18 per cent in the year just finished. In 1997, around 3.7 million families remained on welfare, marking a fall of almost 1.4 million in just over three years.

Defenders of the old welfare system will respond that these falls came as a result of good economic times. With unemployment in the US at a 20-year low of 4.6 per cent, they will say, it is hardly surprising that the numbers have fallen. That would be a persuasive argument were it not for the fact that previous falls in the jobless rate have not had the same effect. A further factor seems to be at work in the current fall, and that factor is clearly welfare reform.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the important question of whether welfare reform is right or wrong, there can be no argument that it is having an effect. Even the modest work requirements that were introduced over recent years at both state and federal level have managed to reduce rolls. This has been the case in places where the economy is strong and in those where it has been relatively weak.

What this shows is that a significant proportion of people have found other options. It still leaves a large majority of welfare recipients on the rolls, and critics of reform can legitimately say that 3.7 million families remains a historically high figure — a powerful index of something very wrong with the US at a time when, economically speaking, so much else is right.

And those "other options" are by no means always jobs. In the political rhetoric of "welfare to work" there is a tidy symmetrical assumption that those who are moved off the rolls move seamlessly into the workforce. The early evidence shows otherwise, suggesting that only half of those who move off welfare take jobs.



State aid . . . families check in for free breakfast at a Milwaukee community centre PHOTO: GARY PORTER

But where are they? For these welfare-less and work-less Americans have not yet surfaced in some alternative index of social or economic change. There has not, for example, been a sudden rise in homelessness. Nor is there a wave of abandoned children, as some critics had feared. Indeed most of the fears of those who opposed welfare reform have not been vindicated. And yet those hundreds of thousands must be somewhere. The current assumption is that they are relying on families, friends — or the black economy.

It may yet prove to be the case that welfare reform will do more for prostitution than any single act of public policy. For although welfare reform is frequently presented in gender-neutral terms, it is in reality a policy about women, in particular about single mothers. "Despite all the rhetoric about deadbeat dads," the New York Times observed "almost all the burden has remained on the mothers."

In the real world, the other side of the welfare-to-work coin is the provision of child care to enable single mothers to go out and earn a wage. By a circular twist, the most convenient and most available jobs for such women are often as child carers.

This is not the only ironic consequence of welfare reform. Another is that a programme that was initially conceived and then justified to political and public opinion as a way of cutting public expenditure is proving to be very expensive to the federal government and to the states. Indeed welfare reform has actually caused a significant increase in spending per head on welfare recipients.

This is for two reasons. Federal aid to the states in the first era of reform was based on welfare roll figures that are now out of date. The states are therefore awash with upwards of $3 billion that has been paid to them by Washington on behalf of many claimants who are no longer on the rolls.

The second reason is that falling rolls leave more in the states' kitty to be spent on those who remain reliant on state benefit.

Not all the cash goes into recipients' pockets, however. Some of it goes into related services that are especially relevant to the welfare population, such as child care, mental health services and drug and alcohol programmes, though this is very patchy. In some states, such as New York, the money saved from welfare has been recycled into tax breaks from which those in work can benefit, as well as those who are not in work.

And very few states are investing their money in planning for the moment when the good economic times come to an end and the demand increases for the diminished welfare budget. That, when it comes — as it must — will be the real moment of truth for the US's ambitious, currently encouraging but as yet unproven system of welfare reform.

Concerns over euro gain currency



Europe this week

Martin Walker

ALTHOUGH this is their final year of independence, there have so far been no farewell ceremonies for the deutschmark and the French franc, for the lira and peseta, for the escudo and guilder, and the Austrian schilling. There should be, because the official timetable for the coming of the new currency conceals a surprising acceleration in the process.

The official schedule runs like this: On January 1 next year, the new euro comes into existence, and the European Union itself, governments and the big corporations will start to keep their books and make their payments in the new single currency.

The local currencies and the euro are then supposed to co-exist until the end of 2001, when the quaint old national coinages fall into history's dustbin, leaving the euro standing alone beside the United States dollar as one of the two international currencies that matter.

In reality, something fundamental happens this May, just after the decision is taken on which of the EU nations qualify under the Maastricht criteria and are ready and willing to sign up for the euro. Each of the national currencies must then set and fix its exchange rate against the euro.

The logic behind this was to prevent a period of uncertainty in which the currency speculators could make hay. The possibility is that they have — before the euro is born — simply given a fixed target with some interesting no-lose bets to markets already rattled by the Asian-Pacific crisis. In the words of Oxford economics Professor Walter Eltis chief adviser to the Board of Trade during John Major's government), "the world's financial community will be able to arrange to owe French francs and pesetas or lire, and to be paid in D-marks or guilders".

To summarise the much longer and more complex case deployed by Eltis in his paper for the Centre for Policy Studies entitled "The Creation and Destruction of EMU", he sees the period of fixed exchange rates between euro and national currencies as a free-fire zone for speculators. If the euro holds, such speculators lose nothing. If the exchange rates bend under the strain, the speculators stand to make the same kind of multi-billion dollar fortunes that they made in 1992, when the pound and the lira were forced out of Europe's last stab at a fixed currency system.

There are three serious hurdles that the euro has to show it can overcome even before the currency is formally launched in January 1999. The first is to win the credibility of the markets by establishing it as a strong currency, which probably means keeping EU interest rates higher this year than they otherwise should be. Since higher rates means more expensive borrowing, there will once again be less new investment and fewer new jobs in Europe this year.

That brings the euro to its second hurdle. At some moment, its needs as a reliable currency will clash with the interests of one of the big European national economies. In France or Spain, the political pain of double-digit unemployment could force the government to reflate.

The markets are waiting for just such a test, whether in France or Italy or another country big enough to push its luck, and will watch the result with care. Under the euro rules, any country that breaks the strict monetary targets faces a massive fine until it gets back into line.

The third crisis for the euro might be an attack on the independence and orthodoxy of the new European central bank. If the currency managers can fight off the political pressure from worried national governments, the bank has yet to work out how to fend off the nagging campaign for "democratic accountability" that is now under way in the European Parliament.

But the worst danger of all — a clash of national interests — is the one that now looms. It had been broadly understood that the first central banker for the euro would be the Dutchman Wim Duisenberg. Germany had already given him the nod. But France's demand that their own Jean-Claude Trichet of the Banque de France should get the job has now initiated the first political crisis of the euro era.

A compromise is expected, under which the Dutchman gets the job for four years, and the Frenchman then follows. But the charter of the central bank stressed that to assert the bank's independence, its chairman should serve an eight-year term. If that rule gets scrapped at the first French squawk, as now seems likely, the markets will need a lot more convincing that the bank is above European politics.

Each of these three hurdles must be surmounted, and important precedents set, long before Britain joins the euro. But for the next six months of the UK presidency of the European Council, these tests will be the responsibility of an offshore country where the national economic frontier still matters, whatever Belgian banks may tell their clients.

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In Brief

A BBC television documentary, How To Be Foreign Secretary, alleged that the overseas intelligence service MI6 spies on European Union allies as a means of improving Whitehall's negotiating position in Brussels.

LABOUR'S ability to mount a sustained campaign in the European and council elections next year was in doubt when it emerged that the party had amassed a £4.5 million debt last year — the biggest in its history.

TWO Euro-MPs, Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, face expulsion from the Labour party after switching to the Green block in protest over benefit cuts for lone parents and changes to candidate selection procedures.

EUROTUNNEL is proposing to build a second Channel Tunnel, this time a road link, alongside the current rail route.

WOMEN are being paid about 20 per cent less than their male colleagues, but are taking most new professional jobs, a survey by London Chamber of Commerce and the University of London indicated.

JIM SHAW, a coach driver whose vehicle plunged 70ft off a mountain road in the French alps killing three schoolchildren, was found guilty of manslaughter and fined £1,200.

DEATHS from cancer last year fell to their lowest level for 10 years, a report by Cancer Research Campaign revealed.

SIXTEEN illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were found alive by Dover Customs officers after a perilous journey spent squeezed into the top of a refrigerated lorry.

ROISIN McALISKEY, wanted by Germany as an alleged member of an IRA unit that bombed a British Army barracks in 1996, was committed for extradition by Bow Street magistrates court in London.

A TELEPHONE hotline selling tickets to visit the grave of Diana, Princess of Wales was overwhelmed on the first day of sale by up to 10,000 calls a minute. Meanwhile an interim report into the car crash that led to Diana's death confirmed that a second car, a white Fiat, appears to have been involved.

JIM CRACE won the Whitbread Novel Award for his book Quarantine, a fictional re-creation of Christ's 40 days in the wilderness.

FRANK MUIR, one of the most prolific and inexhaustibly funny comic scriptwriters and performers of the past half century, died aged 77.

Flowers left at the scene of the shooting at the Clifton Tavern, a Catholic bar, which killed one and injured five. The Loyalist Volunteer Force claimed responsibility PHOTO: CARLOS R LOPEZ-BARILLAS

Loyalists threaten Ulster peace

John Mullin

LOYALIST prisoners last Sunday delivered a devastating blow to the peace process when they voted against continued participation at the multi-party talks on Northern Ireland's future.

About 60 per cent of the 130 prisoners from the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Freedom Fighters said they opposed the negotiations, and it is difficult to see how the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), their allied political party, can remain at Stormont.

Dublin's decision to free early nine IRA prisoners before Christmas without warning precipitated the present crisis. It was exacerbated by the murder of Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) leader Billy Wright and the revenge killings of two Catholics.

The announcement is serious for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, who embarked on fresh efforts this week to save the peace process. Unless she can offer concessions to the fringe loyalist parties immediately, the peace process and the three-year loyalist ceasefire is in jeopardy.

Dr Mowlam, who met the fringe loyalist parties on Monday, was due to meet Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists on Tuesday. The mood at Monday's meeting was grim. Gary McMichael, leader of the UDP, emerged to say the peace process was hanging by a thread.

Earlier he said: "It is indicative of the growing frustration within the Unionist community as a whole about the direction of the process, and the lopsided policy employed by the Government. It is clearly causing serious difficulties."

The Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble meanwhile warned that the loyalist ceasefire was "crumbling".

"There is very great concern within loyalist ranks at the moment because of the way in which the peace process has been operating. They have seen it as something that operates solely to their disadvantage," he said.

However there was a glimmer of hope on Monday when Mr Trimble met the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at Downing Street. Both sides described the talks as constructive.

Roy Magee, the Presbyterian minister who helped broker the loyalist ceasefire, offered the Government a get-out. He called for an independent commission to look at the prisoners' issue: that could be enough to allow the fringe parties to stay in.

The multi-party talks are due to restart on January 12. Dr Mowlam said: "The situation is serious, but not out of control. If we give in to splinter groups who haven't got a ceasefire and who are out to destroy the process, then we have no chance of moving forward."

The Army restarted full patrols in Belfast last week only six weeks after being pulled off the streets during daylight hours. In a move aimed at preventing further sectarian attacks, troops were sent to nationalist areas they had stopped patrolling soon after the IRA ceasefire was restored six months ago.

Army patrols had been scaled down in November in an effort to appease republican opinion. They will now be charged with protecting the Catholic community as the maverick LVF vowed to continue its series of sectarian murders to avenge the killing of its leader.

The army will also guard against retaliation on Protestants from the Irish National Liberation Army, which assassinated Wright at the Maze prison. Like the LVF, it is opposed to the ceasefire.

Ulster's King Rat, page 11

Europhile Tories 'will back Blair'

Michael White

CHRIS PATTEN was this week forced to affirm his loyalty to the Conservative leader, William Hague, as former colleagues gave vent to anger over the latest evidence that pro-European Tories are prepared to back the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, over the single currency.

Mr Patten was one of 12 grandees on the left of the party who signed a letter to the Independent newspaper bemoaning the fact that in 25 years of British European Union membership "too often, Europe has been seen not as an opportunity but as a threat". Mr Hague's pledge not to consider joining the single European currency for 10 years is a classic example of that attitude, Lord Howe — thought to be the letter's principal author — later made plain.

Such views from such figures as the former prime minister, Sir Edward Heath, Michael Heseltine, Lord Howe, Sir Leon Brittan and John Gummer are hardly new. But Mr Patten is the only one of the 12 — apart from Kenneth Clarke — with a serious hope of again being a major player in British politics.

Mr Patten played down the significance of his gesture which, its authors suggest, is intended to boost the sagging morale of the Tory left and draw a line in the sand on Europe.

"The letter contains eminently moderate and sensible advice for the party. I am sure that William Hague, who is a highly intelligent and effective leader, sees that it is important for a party to use both wings," Mr Patten told reporters as Tory Eurosceptics, including Norman Lamont, told the 12 to shut up.

The letter, which both Labour and the Lib Dems said largely reflects their own policies, declared: "We believe it important that [monetary union] should succeed and for Britain to prepare now to join a successful single currency."

It adds: "Conservatives committed to Britain at the heart of Europe will support Tony Blair and his colleagues in making the right decisions on the difficult challenges which lie ahead — during the next six months and beyond."

Blair awards new class of honour

Lucy Ward

EDUCATION, proclaimed as Tony Blair's key priority before the election, was last week given unprecedented prominence in the Prime Minister's first full honours list since gaining power.

The 976-name New Year Honours List included 58 awards in recognition of work in the field of education.

Those honoured included professors, caretakers, secretaries, a lollipop lady and the first ever "sirs for sirs" — a knighthood and two DBEs for three headteachers credited with raising standards and driving out failure. "The vast majority of teachers do an excellent job, and in making education the focus of this list, we are not only honouring the best of this profession, but the profession itself," Mr Blair said.

The list also reflected another national preoccupation of 1997, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. There was a knighthood for Elton John, singer of the tribute hit "Candle in the Wind", and further honours for close aides to the princess and those who played a key role in her funeral last September.

But Mr Blair's stated desire to modernise the honours system has not so far led to any further significant changes from past years in the range of names selected. Seekers of youthful symbols of Cool Britannia among the recipients may be disappointed: names from the showbiz world included Petula Clark, aged 64, who was made a CBE, and veteran actress Deborah Kerr, now 76, who was too frail to leave her Swiss home to collect her CBE.

Knighthoods went to Sandy Wilson, newly feted architect of the British Library, composer Richard Rodney Bennett, science fiction author Arthur C Clarke, painter Terence Frost and actor Michael Gambon. Shakespearean actor Alan Howard and writer David Lodge received OBEs.



Arthur C Clarke: knighted

In the world of sport, Tom Finney, aged 75, one of English football's finest forwards, received a knighthood. There was an OBE for Martin Johnson, who led the British Lions' victorious rugby union team in South Africa during the summer.

In the media, Michael Grade, former Channel 4 chief executive, received a CBE, while the Daily Mall's Lynda Lee Potter got an OBE.

There were no political honours on the list, although David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionists, joined the Privy Council. Sir Robin Butler, the outgoing Cabinet Secretary, became a life peer, as did the former Bishop of Liverpool and cricketer, the Right Reverend David Sheppard. Paul Hamlyn, the Labour-supporting millionaire publisher whose £500,000 donation to the Labour party helped propel it to election victory, had his services to publishing and education to thank for his life peerage.

Chris Patten became a Companion of Honour after overseeing the handover of Hong Kong as governor. The same honour went to political and social historian Professor Eric Hobsbawm, while anti-apartheid campaigner Archbishop Trevor Huddleston received a knighthood.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Minister rides storm over son's small cannabis deal

"SON of Cabinet minister arrested for supplying cannabis." It was a very British story that broke on Christmas Eve, when there was precious little other news about. And, in truth, it was not really much of a story.

The teenage children of politicians are no less exposed to the drug culture than any other of their contemporaries, and this 17-year-old was not the first to fall foul of the law. He had, allegedly, been approached in a pub by two Daily Mirror reporters who persuaded him to sell them 1.92 grams of the stuff for £10.

The story occupied no fewer than five pages of the tabloid. The minister, forewarned of the publication, contacted the police and his son followed suit, allegedly confessing to what he had done. End of story? Nothing of the sort.

The law prohibits the publication of any details that could lead to the identification of juvenile offenders, so the minister could not be identified either. Police stations are leaky and Fleet Street is gossipy, so most journalists knew who he was. The fact that they could not name him was somehow made to look like a government cover-up.

That impression was compounded when the Attorney-General, quite unnecessarily, obtained a court injunction to prevent the publication of the minister's name. And the police made matters worse by heavy-handedly arresting Dawn Alford, one of the Mirror reporters, for "possessing" the cannabis for up to 24 hours before it was sent for analysis.

By this time the minister had been named in newspapers in France, the Irish Republic and Scotland, and also on the Internet, so a High Court judge bowed to the inevitable and lifted the ban on his identification. It was, ironically, the hardline Home Secretary, Jack Straw, who is tough on crime and drugs, and in favour of parents taking responsibility for the misdeeds of their offspring.

Mr Straw gave a fatherly press conference from which he emerged relatively unscathed. His son, William, will probably escape with a police caution and go on to take up the university place at Oxford that he was offered on the day he owned up to his misdemeanour. But the law on identifying young offenders has been breached; media behaviour will come in for more scrutiny; and the sorry affair has reopened demands for an informed debate, at least, on the decriminalisation of soft drugs.

UNEASE about the breakdown of government accountability and effective decision-making was voiced by Sir Robin Butler, the outgoing Cabinet Secretary and head of the Civil Service, when he retired to become Master of University College, Oxford, his alma mater.

Cabinet Secretaries are shadowy but powerful figures, and Sir Robin's innermost thoughts have hitherto been confided only to prime ministers — Tony Blair, John Major, Margaret Thatcher and James Callaghan.

He believes, however, that lack of trust in elected politicians and a fear of leaks have led to small groups of ministers taking decisions without adequate consultation or discussion.

"People are so distrustful of politicians that ministers pass decisions to someone even less accountable. It is a great paradox," said Sir Robin. He predicted a backlash against the businessmen and others whom Mr Blair has brought in to Whitehall to chair a host of task forces.

THE POET and novelist Laurie Lee earned the loyalty and affection of thousands of readers through his autobiographical trilogy, Cider With Rosie, As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning, and, lastly, A Moment Of War, which described his adventures during the Spanish civil war.

Those admirers were indignant when Simon Courtauld, writing in The Spectator magazine, claimed that Lee had "falsified and embellished" events at which he could not have been present. Some saw it as the character-smearing of a writer who died only recently.

Sadly, however, the evidence seemed to support Courtauld. Bill Alexander, now 87, the British commander of the International Brigade, said with evident regret that Lee did not take part in the battle he described. But no one disputed that he was in the battle zone, or that he was imprisoned for two weeks as a spy.

Most of the others who could testify are long dead, so the controversy is unlikely to be settled. Vernon Scannell, a contemporary of Lee's, wondered whether it really mattered all that much. He suggested that other writers claiming to have experienced military adventures — William Faulkner and Scott Fitzgerald, for example — had been shown up as less than truthful. But neither of them claimed to be recording factual events. Lee's reputation, however, will doubtless survive.

THE QUEEN has approved the appointment of the first royal "focus group" to act as an instant sounding board to help her to learn about what the public thinks of the royal family at any given time.

The royals were widely accused of being "out of touch" with public opinion following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, when they maintained a stiff-upper-lipped silence in their Scottish holiday home of Balmoral while much of the rest of the nation was involved in a huge display of public mourning for the princess.

In a recent speech, the Queen acknowledged the need to keep in touch with public opinion, but added that: "For us as a royal family . . . the message is often harder to read, obscured as it can be by deference, rhetoric or the conflicting currents of public opinion. But read it we must."

The focus group, similar to those used to test the planned policies of the Labour party before their election victory last May, will be organised by Mori, which has a long-term track record in providing information for industry and predicting election outcomes.



Rollercoaster . . . Waves lash the sea front at Portleven in west Cornwall during last weekend's storms, which saw winds of up to 115mph — the worst to hit mainland Britain since the hurricane of 1987. More than 100,000 homes were left without power and hundreds more were flooded. The gales led to four deaths, numerous injuries and major disruption on roads PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON BURT

Benefit cuts to reap £3.2bn

David Hencke

BENEFIT cuts totalling £3.2 billion are to be imposed by Tony Blair's government over the next two years before the Prime Minister has even started implementing Labour's welfare state review, according to figures produced by the House of Commons library.

The findings show in detail the effect of the Government's decisions not to restore recent Tory benefit cuts and to continue to pursue the Conservatives' policies by imposing more cuts later this year on an annual welfare bill which stands at more than £90 billion.

The biggest "windfall" for ministers comes from cutting benefits to the disabled by keeping to the policies of Peter Lilley, the Tory former social security secretary, who replaced invalidity benefit with incapacity benefit.

Here an expected £2.5 billion expenditure savings by 2001 would allow the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to introduce a tax-cutting budget to woo electors. The cuts are before ministers consider huge savings that could be made by limiting the new disability living allowance or taxing benefits for better-off disabled people.

Ministers will also save over £700 million by not restoring Tory cuts affecting the children of lone parents, the unemployed, war pensioners and even £3 million from the destitute, who need to apply for loans to get basics.

Two measures to help the poor have been introduced at a cost of £600 million: the £400 million help for winter fuel bills for the next two years; and help for lone parents and families in low-paid work to set child care costs against claims for family credit, council tax benefit and housing benefit. Even so, the Government is on course for a net saving of more than £2 billion.

The figures were obtained by Ann Clwyd, Labour MP for Cynon Valley.

She said: "I have been shocked by the scale of the cuts. Some of them — like taking away industrial injury benefits from retired miners and factory workers — are really mean and I expected a Labour government to reverse them, not continue to follow Tory policies.

"I think these figures will bring home to people the scale of the economies. They are likely to lead to the stiffening of resolve among the 47 Labour MPs who have already refused to support the lone parent benefit cuts."

The analysis also discloses that Labour has overshot Conservative spending targets because of rising inflation.

Ministers have had to spend an extra £600 million above Tory targets to compensate pensioners, children, the disabled and the short-term unemployed. Higher inflation triggered a 3.6 per cent rise in benefits for these groups, instead of a planned 2.5 per cent rise. The long-term unemployed, who receive housing benefit as well, got a 2.4 per cent rise instead of the planned 2.25 per cent.

Burger kings conquer Britain

Sarah Boseley

UNDAUNTED by BSE, unfazed by Britain's longest libel case, the burger culture is marching into corners of the British Isles as yet untouched by buns, fries and ketchup.

The world's two biggest burger chains, McDonald's and Burger King, are planning big expansions to supply what they believe is the nation's increasing appetite for fast food.

McDonald's intends to open 100 restaurants each year until 2000, it announced last week, to add to the 830 it has at present. This will create 5,000 new jobs next year, although most will be low-paid and part-time. Wages for those aged over 18 will be going up to £3.50 an hour from mid-January. McDonald's claims that, by 2000, it will be the single biggest employer of those aged between 16 and 20.

Its big rival, Burger King, which has 455 restaurants, is to open 55 new outlets next year.

McDonald's is revelling in its success and popularity. "This is in line and exceeding the targets we set in 1994," said director of communications, Mike Love. "We provide the service and the food that people want. McDonald's is very popular. We base what we do on what customers tell us."

Tim Lang, professor of food policy at Thames University, opposes the relentless progress of American fast food culture.

"I would be toasting the companies if they were moving into selling fruit and vegetables, but selling more burgers is hardly the sort of advance that the British diet needs," he said.

"Essentially what's happened is that a grazing food culture has taken over the British. It is thought that 20 to 25 per cent of all our food and drink is now consumed out of the home. That is an enormous proportion."

Britons spend about £1.26 billion a year on burgers from fast food outlets.

McDonald's claims to feed more than 35 million people a day worldwide through 23,000 outlets in 105 countries.

Fury at plan to charge for the Pill

Sarah Boseley

FAMILY planning campaigners, doctors and Labour backbenchers last week lambasted the Government for refusing to rule out charging women for contraceptive pills as part of a package of proposals to cut costs in the National Health Service.

The onslaught was led by the British Medical Association and the Birth Control Trust and backed by an all-party group of 47 MPs, all of whom professed themselves appalled at the prospects of more unwanted pregnancies among those who might abandon the Pill if they had to pay for it.

Dr Sandy Macara, chairman of the BMA, which in general supports the review of prescription charges, said: "I would be horrified at any move to charge for contraceptive pills.

"Britain already has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in western Europe. Whilst it is true that many women may well be able to pay for their contraceptive pills, the broader cause of public health requires the greatest possible access to contraception.

"Any savings on the prescription bill could well be outweighed by the costs to the NHS of unwanted pregnancy and abortion, let alone the emotional cost to the individual of an unwanted pregnancy."

He was backed by Dr George Rae, chairman of the BMA's prescribing committee, who said: "I would be against women being charged for the contraceptive pill. It would act as a disincentive and flies in the face of Health Of The Nation targets for reducing our very high levels of unplanned pregnancy."

Ann Furedi, director of the Birth Control Trust which has been lobbying strongly in Parliament on the issue, said: "If changes are made to family planning services, they should be improvements to make it easier for people to access appropriate contraceptive services, and certainly we do not need anything that can act as a disincentive."

Toni Belfield, director of information at the Family Planning Association, said research showed every £1 spent on contraceptive services saved the NHS £11 in dealing with the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. "The issues are quite clear. If [charging for the Pill] is going to be considered, there needs to be very good cost/benefit analysis. There are already savings to the public purse."

Motions have been introduced in both Houses of Parliament by opponents of charges for contraception — not just the Pill, which is taken by an estimated one in four fertile women — but other contraception prescribed by clinics such as the diaphragm. Condoms are not generally handed out on prescription.

A spokesman for the Department of Health last week maintained the government line, which is that nothing is ruled in and nothing ruled out of the spending review.

The Pill has been free since 1974. It is thought the proposals might involve levying the £5.65 prescription charge on women able to pay, but exempting students and those on income support. Ms Furedi said that, as with eye tests, charges acted as a deterrent and many who would be exempt did not realise it.

Byers acts on gender gap crisis

John Carvel

THE Government this week acknowledged that underachievement by boys at school has reached crisis proportions.

The School Standards Minister, Stephen Byers, placed a new obligation on local education authorities to remedy a growing gender gap which is leaving boys lagging behind girls at every stage of education.

"We must challenge the laddish, anti-learning culture which has been allowed to develop over recent years. We should not simply accept with a shrug of the shoulders that boys will be boys," Mr Byers told an international conference in Manchester on school standards and effectiveness.

He presented new evidence of girls outperforming boys at GCSE, however rich or poor might be the neighbourhood of their school, and said that the gender gap is as much a middle-class as a working-class phenomenon.

Only one of more than 130 education authorities in England had more boys than girls getting five good GCSE grades. In Croydon, North Somerset, Wigan and Portsmouth, 15 per cent more girls than boys reached that standard.

Byers: 'we must challenge the laddish anti-learning culture'

Mr Byers disclosed that 28,500 boys leave school each year with no qualification, compared with 21,500 girls. The discrepancy starts at an early age, with girls "dramatically outperforming" boys in national curriculum tests at seven, 11 and 14.

Ministers are worried that boys have a lack of role models in primary schools where most teachers are women. They have asked the teachers' pay review body to consider higher salaries for primary heads to make it a more attractive career for both sexes.

Mr Byers said the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority would publish recommendations later this month on how to raise boys' achievement in English at all ages.

"Our aim must be high achievement for all — both boys and girls. It is vital that policies aimed at disaffected boys are not introduced at the expense of girls whose improvement over recent years has been a national success story," Mr Byers said.

"However we must recognise that if we are to create a modern Britain and a decent society, then the present level of under-achievement by boys will need to be tackled as a matter of urgency."

● The Government's proposals for a national computer record of the educational attainment of every child have been attacked by the Data Protection Registrar as a potential threat to pupils' safety and civil liberties.

Ministers plan to provide each child with an identity number which would be used to track progress from the start of primary school through to university. A central database would carry information on every pupil's social, economic and ethnic background as well as academic results and special educational needs.

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New foods 'are safer'

GOVERNMENT advisers have suggested that genetically modified food may be safer than conventional crops — a verdict sure to enrage green consumers calling for stricter controls or bans on such products, *writes James Meikle.*

The advisers dismissed allegations against such engineering made by a recent Greenpeace report — that it was creating toxic bacteria, crops that threatened new allergies, and animals with poor health.

The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, including scientists and academics, said in an unpublished paper that conventional methods of crop improvement, including using wild relatives and different species, already had the potential to introduce risks into the food chain and change quantities of DNA, the building block of life.

In contrast, the regulatory system for genetically modified crops meant "we can define what is put in in terms of DNA sequence and we have some knowledge of where it goes". Such products also received much greater testing than conventional varieties.

Doug Parr, author of the Greenpeace report, Genetic Engineering: Too Good To Go Wrong?, said the advisers had "missed the essential criticism — that genetic engineering is an unpredictable technique".

He argued that introducing new DNA was a random process, and disrupting genes in host organisms had unknown consequences.

The committee said Dr Parr had made "a strong case for continued vigilance" but had failed to justify any tightening of the regulatory framework. His examples where mistakes had occurred indirectly highlighted the strength of existing European rules, the committee said.

The paper said: "There is no mention [in the Greenpeace report] of the fact that there are many millions of people alive today who would not have survived were it not for the massive improvements in crop yields brought about by the development of new agricultural technologies."

Truants blamed for street crime

CHILDREN aged between 10 and 16 are responsible for 40 per cent of all street robberies and a third of car thefts and burglaries in London, according to the Metropolitan Police, *writes John Carvel.*

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has ordered the Downing Street social exclusion unit to give urgent priority to devising new strategies against truancy after receiving figures that reveal the extent of a crime wave perpetrated by youngsters meant to be at school.

Sir Paul Condon, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, told the exclusion unit — which was set up last month to devise new solutions to the problems of poverty — that most of the offences took place during school hours.

The unit has also received a bleak report from the government-backed Basic Skills Agency about appallingly low educational attainment among offenders aged between 17 and 25.

Interviews with 500 such offenders showed that 21 per cent could not write their name and address without error. About half had difficulty telling the time and giving the days of the week or the months of the year in the right order. Only 30 per cent could fill in a job application form satisfactorily.

About 90 per cent of those interviewed said they had been truants at some stage in their school careers.

● Parents of persistent truants are to be issued with electronic pagers as part of a £22 million programme for improving school attendances. In a pilot scheme, parents will be sent an instant warning by the school if their children fail to attend, and will be expected to take whatever action is necessary to get the children back into class.

Gloom descends on Israeli politics

WHEN governments fall it is usually called a crisis, and there is a cheer when they live on instead. With Binyamin Netanyahu's limping regime in Israel, the reverse is true. On Monday he survived the challenge to his budget, after the resignation of the foreign minister, David Levy, more easily than expected. Defeat would have kindled a spark, but his (probably temporary) victory has only deepened the cloud over Israeli politics and the peace process.

The White House press spokesman went whistling in the dark to re-assure us that the new crisis made no difference. "The Middle East peace process", he said, "has always continued in its sometimes measured way despite internal political developments [in Israel]." If by measured he means minuscule, he is only too right. No one would ever expect Netanyahu, if he meets President Clinton later this month, to deliver enough to revitalise the process. His insistence on subordinating peace to security — unlike Yitzhak Rabin, who treated them as equally important but separate issues — ensures that. But without his late foreign minister Netanyahu will be, if possible, even less forthcoming as the coalition clutch of ultra-right/religious parties breathes heavily down his neck.

Netanyahu has sought to rally defectors with one of the most remarkable warnings to be delivered by an incumbent prime minister. A defeat for him would lead to an election that he would lose. And Israel under a Labour government would end up by being returned "to its pre-1967 borders". That is actually not a bad idea — though there is no prospect that Labour would ever go that far. But a defeat for Bibi and at least a sporting chance of a government that is prepared to make a fair deal with the Palestinians? Now that would be worth cheering for.

A dictator in the Vatican

IT'S A rum deal when the Catholic Times — renowned for its obsequious loyalty — runs a lead story under the headline "Vatican is behaving badly". Not many will know of the heated row raging between the government of the tiny tax haven of Liechtenstein and the Vatican. But chiming as it uncannily does with the first anniversary of the excommunication of the Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya and with the second anniversary of the removal of the French bishop Jacques Gaillot from the diocese of Evreux, it is a chilling reminder of the arbitrary power of the Pope. Behind the Liechtenstein story is one of the longest-running and least edifying squabbles of this papacy. Seven years ago the Vatican swept aside locals' objections and imposed the arch-conservative, autocratic Bishop Wolfgang Haas on the Swiss diocese of Chur. Haas had to step over the bodies of protesters to reach the cathedral for his consecration. Finally, an exasperated Swiss government asked the Vatican to move the bishop. Late last year, they did. To Liechtenstein, which has the dubious privilege of an established Roman Catholic Church. There was no consultation with devout Liechtensteiners, and the government's remonstrations with the Vatican have been met with silence. Archbishop Haas's consecration last week was attended by noisy demonstrations.

Meanwhile Balasuriya — the first Catholic theologian to be excommunicated since 1953 — will come under intense pressure this month to sign the *ad hominem* profession of faith drawn up for him by the Vatican. Given his views on women, this profession includes — with an Inquisition-style ruthlessness — subscribing to the *inordainability* of women. Since many Catholic priests privately acknowledge that there is no doctrinal argument against the ordination of women, the Vatican's demands have made this obscure theologian into a human rights victim.

The heavy-handed, clumsy and ideologically-driven nature of this papacy has been its most unattractive characteristic. It has also been its most surprising: how could someone who had experienced at first hand an authoritarian, repressive regime in Poland be such a stern disciplinarian? His active interference in the appointment of bishops and the disciplining of theologians has disappointed — and alienated — a generation of Catholics inspired by Vatican Council II, who believed that the 19th century centralisation of the Catholic Church had finally been checked. After all, it was only in 1917 that the Pope took on the task of appointing bishops who were elected by the faithful for a thousand years. The Pope's repeated emphasis on human rights — most recently enunciated in his Christmas message — rings hollow from an institution that does not put its own house in order.

This must contribute to the catastrophically declining numbers of Catholics in western Europe. Not among those for whom faith is a matter of ethnic identity, familial or social habit, where such rows between distant prelates probably have little relevance. But the damage to the credibility of the Church as an institution of integrity with respect for intellectual freedom is incalculable. In Germany and Austria the We Are The Church movement has collected 2.5 million signatures for urgent reform of the papacy. A recent survey found majority support — even in staunchly Catholic countries such as Ireland and Spain — in favour of electing bishops. The unsexy subject of reforming the Church hierarchy has risen to top of the agenda alongside married priests and contraception.

Grim reading for young males

SCHOOLS in Britain were given a new challenge this week: improving the performance of boys. Ministers have become alarmed by the degree to which boys are falling behind girls in both primary and secondary schools. Stephen Byers, the schools minister, could not have been blunter in his speech to an international conference on school effectiveness in Manchester: "We must challenge the laddish, anti-learning culture which has been allowed to develop over recent years and should not simply accept with a shrug of the shoulders that boys will be boys." Good for Mr Byers. It is easy for opposition ministers to speak out against an anti-learning culture, much rarer to see an education minister accepting that something must be done.

The official statistics released last weekend make grim reading. They show girls outperforming boys at GCSE level in all but one local authority. In terms of the proportion of pupils obtaining five A to C grades at GCSE, the gap between boys and girls has widened nationally to 9 per cent in the last decade. In some areas, 15 per cent more girls than boys are achieving this academic benchmark. At the bottom of the pile, 28,500 boys leave school each year without any qualifications compared with only 21,500 girls.

Some qualifications are needed. Not everything is new. Four decades ago girls were doing better than boys in the 11 plus, requiring education administrators to set a lower cut-off point for boys to ensure that equal numbers of each gender went on to grammar schools. Although girls are less likely to fail A levels, boys collect more A grades. Researchers suggest boys take more risks than girls leading to both their higher proportion of A grades and their higher failure rates.

What else is going on? Both boys and girls have improved their performance at GCSE, but girls have accelerated ahead much faster. One reason is the nature of GCSE, which plays to girls' strengths in its emphasis on continual assessment of course work. Boys have always done better in sudden-death tests like end-of-year examinations. Most important, girls now have far more ambition than three decades ago. Equal opportunity policies have played their part. So have the new opportunities generated by a hi-tech service economy.

So what should schools do? First they should remember that most pupils could improve their standards — nor forget that 21,500 girls leave without any qualifications. Ministers are right to challenge education authorities to come up with their own schemes. Policy makers have still a lot to learn. Ministers are keen to see more male teachers in primary schools. The research on male role models is ambivalent, but if this means ministers will be ready to increase primary school pay, no one should object. The current literacy and numeracy task forces are aimed at 7- to 11-year-olds. They need to intervene earlier, beginning with nursery school preparation.

No fighting in Bosnia, but it's a lousy peace

Martin Woollacott

WHEN politicians use archaic words, it is usually a sign they want to blur the issue. "You have seen what the war has *wrought*," President Clinton told an audience in Sarajevo on his trip there last month. In 20th century English he would have better said: "You have seen what the war has *done*", but that would not have served the purpose of mystification, the presentation of the conflict as a regressive medieval phenomenon with which a modern nation like the United States could have no connection except as a saviour bringing help and the means of reconstruction.

By that word, it might be not too fancifully argued, President Clinton distanced himself and the US from the war and its causes. Indeed, everything he said during his visit proposed the US as part of the solution, with never a hint that it has been from the beginning a part of the problem and remains so today. It is not only that Yugoslavia was for many years a country economically sustained and politically indulged by the US as much as it was by western Europe, a fact which, among other things, partly insulated its government from the economic failures that undermined other eastern bloc regimes. That helped its Communist leaders to avoid the fate of their counterparts elsewhere as the bloc fell apart, and to transform themselves into nationalists. Nor only that the US, fixated on the problem of Soviet breakdown, failed to see what was happening in Yugoslavia until too late, and then, under President Bush, took a fatalist line. It is that Clinton himself, over the more than five years since he first began campaigning against Bush's policy, influenced the course of the war. People died as he dithered, and because he dithered. That European leaders were also at fault does not much lessen his responsibility.

Clinton was urging military action in the summer of 1992, but when he became president, as Mark Danner makes clear in a long and cogent analysis in the New York Review of Books, Clinton could not summon the will or the nerve to intervene in the way he had so strongly implied he would. Thereafter what Clinton and his administration did served largely to fan the war flames. When the rhetoric leaned toward intervention, that encouraged the Bosnians to fight on, in the hope that the US was finally going to come in and rescue them in some way. When the rhetoric went unsupported by action, that encouraged the Serbs, who came more and more to discount the possibility of Washington's military intervention.

And, whatever Clinton implies, that action never came. What came instead was action by proxy, following a long period of building up the Croatian armed forces, and, to a much lesser extent, the Bosnian forces. The overstretched Bosnian Serbs finally met their Waterloo in the Krajina. The foundation of the Dayton Agreement was the Croatian military victory in the Krajina, with the accompanying mass flight of Krajina Serbs. The Serbs signed it because they knew that a Croatian and Bosnian roll-back could strip them of the whole of the western part of the Bosnian Serb territories — and empty those territories of their Serbian inhabitants, producing a surge of refugees which would undermine not only the Pale regime but also that in Belgrade. European soldiers made a contribution to this overall tipping of the military balance against the Serbs, and US air power had some effect. But it was not the peace-keeping or peace-"enforcing" troops or the US planes that ended the fighting. It was the Serbs, because they feared more Croat and Bosnian victories, and that the situation could only get worse for them. Washington then contrived a "peace" by leaning on the Croatians and, above all, on the Bosnians to sign an agreement. The Serbs were saved, the Croatians were more or less satisfied, but some Bosnians, particularly elements within the ruling party, have the ambition and perhaps the means to go to war for more territory. That, along with fears over Kosovo, is the main negative reason why Nato troops have to stay, and the main reason for European sighs of relief at Clinton's recent decision to indefinitely extend the deadline for the departure of US troops.

THE imperfections of Dayton are well known, and were reviewed last month, two years after the accords came into force. There has been no major fighting and there has been something of an economic revival in the Muslim-Croat federation territories, while in the Serbian entity, the West has interfered in local politics with some small success. On the other hand the country is emphatically still partitioned. Those parts of Dayton that would work to give Bosnia some of the aspects of a single state are precisely the parts that have been most resisted, and not only by the Bosnian Serbs. But the compiling of lists of "achievements" on the one hand and "failures" on the other, misses the point, particularly since many of today's achievements could become tomorrow's means of resuming the war. The point, as Jane Sharp, of the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College, London, says in a recent paper, is that "the tendency to appease rather than to punish the aggression" still drives Western policy in Bosnia.

In other words, the US and Europe still base their policy on accommodating to the strength of the local actors. The West first tried to accommodate and use Slobodan Milosevic, with scant results. Then the US and Germany switched to Franjo Tudjman, with more effective results. Even so, it was not Western strength proper, on the scales but Tudjman's. In spite of the thousands of troops and the millions of dollars of aid, that Western countries have provided, the West still shields itself from cost and confrontation by working *with* rather than, on occasion, *against* the lines of strength in the Balkans. That is one reason why Tudjman and Milosevic still survive. If Clinton's decision to extend the service of US troops means only that we go on as before in the south Slav lands, little will have been gained, even if certain dangers may be avoided. That in truth is what Washington, along with its European allies, has wrought in Bosnia.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 11 1998

Inside the mind of Ulster's King Rat

Billy Wright, the murdered Loyalist paramilitary leader, told **David Sharrock** in a series of interviews what it means to die — and kill — for God and Ulster

THE conventional Ulster wisdom about Billy Wright, the Loyalist leader murdered by Republicans in the Maze prison last month, may be summed up as good riddance, an evil man done away with and not before time. The reality may be rather different.

In the hearts of many Protestants, Billy Wright — King Rat as they called him — was a villain-hero who was turned against by his own after his usefulness expired. A man whom senior Royal Ulster Constabulary officers admit was an organisational genius when it came to mayhem, striking terror into the hearts of Catholics in his Mid-Ulster purview, and whose failure to adjust to the changed circumstances of the Northern Ireland peace process ensured that, from the moment the guns were laid aside, Billy was living on borrowed time.

In a sense he knew that himself. Shortly after the Combined Loyalist Military Command called its ceasefire in October 1994, Wright's restlessness led him to talk with me for many hours about his life. The interviews continued right up until his trial last year when he was sentenced to eight years for intimidation. He toyed with the idea of writing a book, but confessed that to do so would only land him in jail for the rest of his natural days, and he concluded that the full story could only be told after his death.

He has taken a great many secrets, and doubtless a bagful of lies, with him to the grave. But in private, surrounded by his family, his "wee girls" and boy, he was a much more complex figure than the monster his image made him out to be. And elsewhere, among the senior Loyalists of Belfast who condemned him to death, there was an admiration for him, a kind of wistful regard for an old ally turned foe.

One of the last things he told me was: "What do you do when you find yourself out-gunned, out-resourced, out-financed and out-numbered by your enemy? Your only weapon is to be even more ruthless than them." It was a circuitous justification of the high incidence of atrocities perpetrated against the most vulnerable people — the pregnant mothers and pensioners who have been murdered in Mid-Ulster.

This was when I pressed him on specific cases of murders accounted for by the Mid-Ulster brigade of the Ulster Volunteer Force, Wright's team. "There's not a death that I regret," he said. "Every single one of them people, with a few exceptions, were directly or indirectly involved in murder. We were taking on the IRA and giving them a headache and I think that's what's made Mid-Ulster (UVF) stand out. We fought the Provies and had no quarrel or disagreement with the Catholic community.

"I genuinely believe that we were very successful, and that may sound morbid but they know that we hammered them into the ground and we didn't lose one volunteer. Indeed, members of the security forces have said that we done what they couldn't do, we put the East Tyrone brigade of the IRA on the run. It was the East Tyrone brigade which was carrying the war in the whole of the North, including in Belfast. East Tyrone were decimated, the UVF wiped them out and that's not an idle boast."

Asked about the "military value" of specific operations, Wright said: "I would look back and say that Cappagh was probably our best." In March 1991, the UVF shot dead three IRA men as they arrived at Boyle's Bar in Cappagh, an isolated and hard-line republican village in County Tyrone. A fourth man who was also murdered was not connected to the Provisionals.

Wright said that Cappagh was a high-water mark for Loyalists, demonstrating that they could take the war to the IRA in their heartland. But success had a downside, with Republicans tightening their personal security. "It became more difficult to target these people and, from that point of view, the spectaculars weren't to be got. But we believed that there were areas which had been given up by the security forces.

"These were being secured in an arc and the security forces were going round it and at night nipping in and searching it, maybe putting a camera in and coming back out. Now their logic was that they were removing from the IRA the ability to kill them for the simple reason that they weren't on the ground.

"If the IRA wanted to extend its battlefield, it would have to come out through that arc, which was basically impossible. The arc was always put round Protestant areas and in one sense the IRA could claim a victory because they could say that they had taken ground. But from our point of view, there's no part of Ulster that isn't ours. From our own intelligence we were able to nip in and out."

Wright claimed that his strategy had a crucial effect on the Provisionals. "I met very few brave IRA men, to their own shame. Ninety per cent of their senior officers left the battlefield; they ran away, they headed south. That's the nature of them — they want to kill, but they don't want to be killed."

Wright began the present ceasefire period as an enthusiast, relieved that the fighting was over but proud of what he had done and able to justify the slaughter. "I genuinely believe that whenever the two communities started to hurt the same, it wasn't long before we started to talk about peace, negotiations and settlements. And one of the remarkable things in this last number of years is that it became very clear to everyone that all the deaths in Northern Ireland were the responsibility of the IRA. That sunk into the Catholic community.

"It also brought home to the IRA that never again would there be a Teebane, never again would there be an Enniskillen without the nationalist people paying a very heavy price. It wasn't long before internal pressures in the republican movement from the nationalist community changed its direction. It was all regrettable, it should have happened earlier."



Billy Wright: 'There's not a death that I regret' PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN BOYLES

But within a few months, Wright turned hawkish. The publication of the British and Irish governments' Framework document changed his thinking. He saw a constitutional road leading inexorably towards Dublin. The Belfast leadership disagreed and tensions rose. "What's in war for me? If peace breaks down I'm a dead man," said Wright. "But what was the point in all the deaths, all our own people dying and all the boys doing jail if, at the end of the day, it's given away."

Wright was born in Wolverhampton in 1960, his father just one of the many Irishmen who moved to England in search of work. The difference, he claims, was that it was because his grandfather had stood against the monolithic Ulster Unionist Party that he claims his family were forced out of Portadown.

"My grandfather was the first independent councillor in Northern Ireland. He told me out of his own mouth about the injustices that took place against the Roman Catholic people of the North of Ireland and granda fought the local elections on that stance. After winning, he took the brunt of Ulster Unionist bigotry. He was bitterly disappointed that those who professed Christianity and Protestantism did not practise it. You have to remember that it was a one-party state and once you attacked the Unionist Party you were in for a hard time of it, irrespective of being Catholic or Protestant."

In 1964, his parents separated. Wright returned to Ulster and was brought up by a foster parent in Mountnorris, a Protestant village in republican countryside. He remembers being taught at school "all about English wrongs in Ireland . . . it was unique at the time for Protestant schoolchildren to be brought up politically aware of the Irish problem from both perspectives.

"Then I started working the local farms. I can remember very clearly working for a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. And I can recall that when we brought in the hay the other neighbours had to take turns standing guard at the field perimeter. At the time I didn't understand why but when I was 15 I suddenly became aware that my neighbours were being murdered and I began to feel the pain that my people were suffering."

After a juvenile prank, painting "UVF" on a wall, he moved to Portadown and immediately joined its youth wing. "I was sworn in on July 31, 1975. As long as I can ever remember, I have been attracted to the UVF. Although it has caused me a lot of heartache and a lot of things that have been done that I would struggle with morally, I still believe that the traditional army of Northern Ireland is the UVF."

'I met very few brave IRA men, to their own shame. Ninety per cent of their senior officers left the battlefield; they ran away, they headed south. That's the nature of them — they want to kill, but they don't want to be killed' — *Billy Wright*

The same year, he was arrested and questioned at Castlereagh, where he said he was beaten and forced to sign statements. "They were honest but they were obtained illegally. I received six years in jail for possession of firearms, hijacking. When I entered the Maze jail I went on the blanket [refused to wear prison clothes]."

Political status for prisoners had just been removed and Wright took part in the dirty protest until the Belfast leadership ordered its men off, claiming that it was "embarassing" to be seen to be supporting the Provisionals. When he was released after three years, "I remember standing at the gates of the H-block and there beside me was a blanket protester. He had not washed for a year, he was physically wrecked and repulsive to look at. But there was an atmosphere of pure history.

"I knew the significance of what I was witnessing. Here was a movement that would inflict on itself so much violence for its own ideology that what would it not do to other human beings?"

He briefly moved to Scotland, but was arrested under the anti-terrorist legislation and served with an exclusion order. "I came back to Portadown and immediately continued on active service."

During two further spells in prison, neither of which saw him convicted of any crime, he became interested in Christianity.

Wright claimed it was the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and the subsequent RUC-Loyalist clashes which made him break with his faith. "I let Christ down, I accept that. I made a conscious decision. I fell on my knees and apologised to God. But I felt contempt for the British government, hatred for the IRA and longing for justice for Northern Ireland Protestants.

"The only way forward was armed resistance. I drove to the Shankill Road and shook hands with a very senior Loyalist and his first words were, 'It's great to see you back, Billy'. I set about reorganising in Portadown and it was accepted that I had the credentials to do that."

A local journalist writing for the Sunday World newspaper gave Wright the nickname King Rat, writing regularly about his alleged evil activities. Wright said he hated the name at first but grew to accept its worth. "King Rat is a name identified by many as putting two fingers up to the Provies. To others, it's seen as gangsterism, drugs, prostitution — everything that's filthy in the world can be labelled as King Rat.

"But King Rat became a focus for resistance. There are people who don't necessarily accept what King Rat has meant to have done but who are quite prepared to tolerate him because he, more than any down through the Troubles, defied the IRA and did what his forefathers have done, and that is never give an inch."

Shortly before he was gunned down, inside the Maze prison, Wright, now a renegade leader shunned by his UVF comrades, was as combative as ever. "Every one of our generations has thrown forward men prepared to fight for our country and, believe me, we will fight, no matter what the Government says," he said.

"I've done things in life that I regret. My life's full of contradictions, in that I'm a back-street fellow and I find myself in the limelight. Do I regret it? Of course I do. As for what it has cost me, only eternity will tell, only eternity will tell."

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No bargains for Korea in this sale

The IMF rescue package will ultimately benefit the West far more than Seoul, writes **Mark Atkinson**

BEEN to the January sales yet? Picked up any bargains? Procter & Gamble has; so too has Germany's Robert Bosch. Not in the big department stores of London, New York or Paris, of course. This sale is taking place in South Korea, and on offer is more than a new winter coat or three-piece suite. Much of the country is up for grabs.

In return for a financial aid package worth a record $57 billion, the International Monetary Fund has, among other things, forced Korea to liberalise and deregulate, including dropping restrictions on foreign takeovers.

Since December 30, foreign investors have been able to acquire a 55 per cent stake in any listed company. By the end of this year, they will be able to buy the lot.

Business has got off to a slow start. Ssangyong sold its tissue and and sanitary napkin unit to Procter & Gamble, Bosch has taken control of its joint venture with Kia Motors, and Coca-Cola has acquired soft-drink bottling operations from Doosan, the nation's largest brewing institution.

Other deals are in the offing: Hanhwa, for example, is reported to be negotiating the sale of its oil-refining and petrol station business to a leading international refiner, thought to be Royal Dutch Shell.

Before long the shelves may be cleared in much the same way as those at the Harrods crockery and hi-fi departments will be by the end of the month.

But why would the fiercely nationalist South Koreans abandon the policy of industrial self-sufficiency which built their economy into the world's 11th biggest?

For two reasons. First, South Korea's *chaebols*, or conglomerates, are collapsing under the weight of their awesome debts and need the money. Starved of credit, they are being forced to shed excess businesses to stay afloat.

Crédit Lyonnais Securities reckons that only 87 of Korea's listed companies out of a total 653 non-financial firms are relatively safe from the predators.

SBC Warburg Dillon Read, the investment bank, believes that even household names such as Hyundai and Daewoo may be vulnerable unless they restructure quickly.

Second, the prices are of the bargain-basement variety. The Korean currency, the won, fell by about 50 per cent against the US dollar last year. Share prices also plummeted. These falls make Korean companies rich pickings for expansion-minded foreign multinationals, through direct takeover or portfolio investments.

They may be hesitant at the moment, fearing further falls in the months ahead as the crisis continues. But when Western managements are confident that the bottom has been reached they will swoop. When they do, will it be a cause for celebration or regret?

In one sense, there can be cheers — and not just on the part of the foreign investors anticipating fat profits.

Korea's crony capitalism was not sustainable. The chaebols survived on cheap, state-directed bank loans, some of which came indirectly from abroad, which made them complacent. They were able to invest in schemes with little or no productive value. When Western owners arrive en masse in Korea they may administer a welcome dose of market discipline.

But the sell-off of Korea Inc. also leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, and it will not necessarily solve the country's economic crisis in the long term. It may even make the economy more unstable.

There is something morally distasteful about the IMF lending money for Korea to pay off its short-term foreign debts and in return demanding draconian reforms which will ultimately benefit the West, and meanwhile requiring Korean shareholders, depositors and employees to suffer. In his new year message, South Korea's president-elect, Kim Dae-jung, warned: "Inflation will flare up, unemployment rise and numerous companies collapse."

There is also an economic objection to the reform package: if the IMF once again rescues foreign fund managers from the consequences of an unwise investment, there is no incentive for them to change their behaviour. Investment in emerging markets is rapidly becoming a one-way bet. Either it pays off with huge returns to reflect the supposed risk of the investment or, if it all goes down the toilet, the international bodies step in to bail out foreign creditors.

There is an alternative. Korea could simply default on its loans. Western banks could take the hit. Perhaps they would then be more careful about lending money abroad in the first place, instead of simply being blinded by greed.

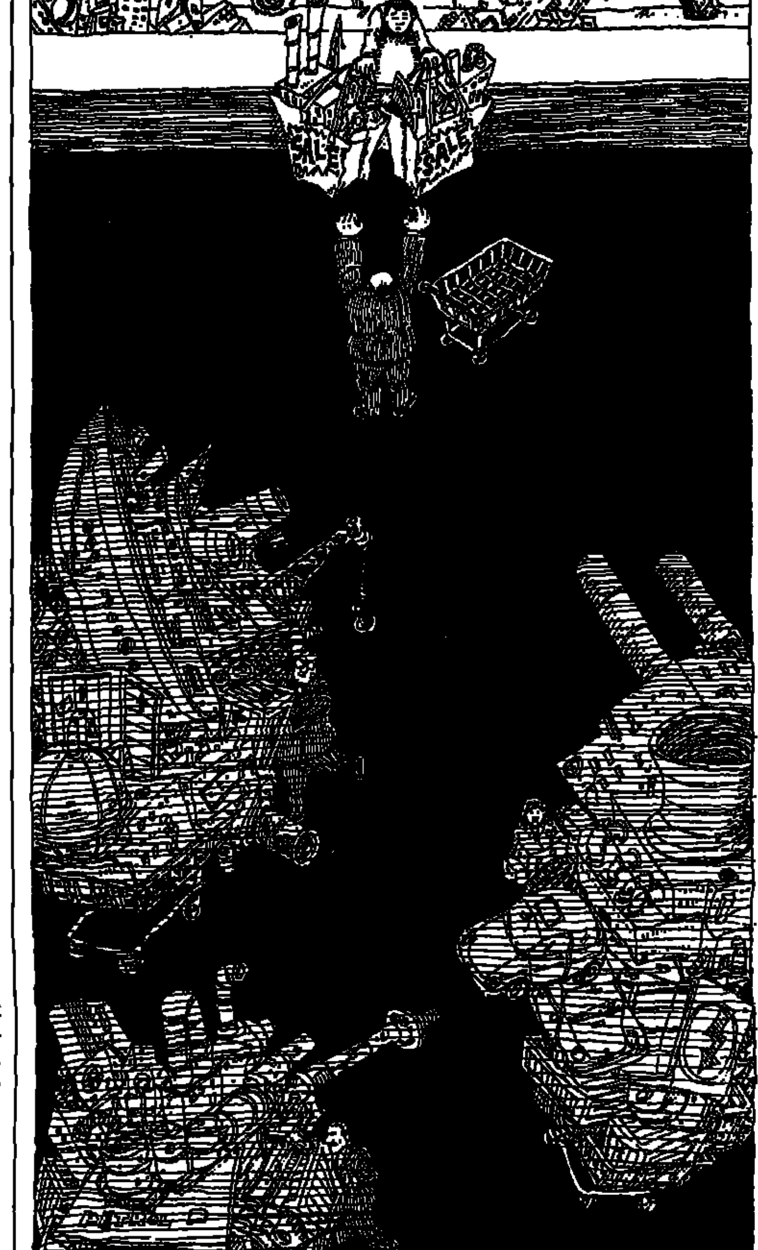
True, Korea, whose credit rating has already been reduced to junk-bond status, would find it even harder to raise money on the international capital markets if it acquired the reputation as a defaulter. But what money the Koreans have left could be used to reflate the domestic economy rather than pay off foreign debts.

The practical point, however, is that financial liberalisation is not necessarily a stepping stone to an orderly system of market supervision and management, as events in Thailand have shown.

If Thailand had not attracted so much footloose foreign capital, it would not have run into the difficulties which ultimately brought the economy to its knees and sparked the whole Asian crisis.

Yet the IMF is now suggesting Korea follow the same route as Thailand. If it complies fully with the IMF's request to open up its economy, Korea could become more, not less, vulnerable to capital flight in the future. So what should be done to guard against this danger?

Various suggestions will no doubt be forthcoming from the IMF and the Group of Seven during their regular meetings this year. But they will probably amount to no more than better surveillance and greater transparency.



Meanwhile it has fallen to none other than George Soros, the arch-speculator, to come forward with a solution. From the man blamed by Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad for causing the Asian crisis comes a plan involving greater regulation of the international capital markets.

MR SOROS says that an International Credit Insurance Corporation should be set up as a sister institution to the IMF. Its job would be to guarantee loans for a small fee. Borrowing countries would be obliged to provide data on all borrowings, public or private. This would enable the new authority to set limits on the amounts it would be willing to insure. Creditors going beyond these limits would be on their own.

"The authority would base its judgment not only on the amount of credit outstanding but also on the macroeconomic conditions in the countries concerned," Mr Soros says. "This would render any excessive credit expansion unlikely."

Mr Soros admits that there are difficulties. "The most important is the link between the borrowing countries and the borrowers within those countries. Special care must be taken not to give governments discretionary power over allocation of credit because that could foster corrupt dictatorships," he says.

But it certainly seems worthy of serious consideration at the high tables of international finance, which have shown a marked lack of imagination in dealing with the Asian crisis.

The IMF has acted with great speed to prevent the crisis spilling over into advanced economies, by making sure their debtors can repay loans. But sweeping away impediments to foreign ownership are not necessarily in the best interests of countries such as Korea.

Armed with a competitive currency following the devaluation of the won, Korea might have been better off left alone to export its way out of trouble and restructure using internal financing drawn from a high level of domestic savings.

The difficulty is that this would not have gone down well in the West, which would have seen its share of export markets eroded without any offsetting benefit.

As it is, following the IMF bailout, Korea as a production base will still enjoy a significant cost advantage over the West. But the profits of Korean-based enterprises will flow to US, European and Japanese owners, not the Koreans.

Washington Post, page 14

Spotlight now falls on plight of Indonesia

Nick Cumming-Bruce

INDONESIA may become the next victim of Asia financial turmoil, as the country is hit by a combination of political uncertainty and potential loan defaults.

The Standard & Poor's rating agency downgraded Indonesian government foreign currency debt last week to below investment grade. S&P cited, among other problems, the government's growing social costs stemming from falling real incomes and unemployment. Last week the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce estimated that 1 million workers lost jobs last year. This problem will be exacerbated by Malaysia's announcement that it expects to deport 1 million foreign workers, many of them Indonesians.

The crunch comes from Indonesia's promise to reform its economy through fiscal and monetary austerity: a promise that earned $37 billion from an international consortium led by the International Monetary Fund. The goodwill resulting from that agreement is fast evaporating, however, as authorities appear to backtrack on key areas of financial reform.

Add to that a massive capital flight in the past two months, huge short-term, dollar-denominated debt and a further fall in the rupiah last month, and Indonesia is "a time bomb waiting to go off", according to Nat Saker, head of regional research at SocGen-Crosby in Singapore.

As worrisome as Indonesia's financial strains are the uncertainties about what political leaders will do to relieve them. President Suharto's willingness to sign up to the IMF's conditions appears to have wavered when First Family interests are at stake.

Finance minister Mar'ie Muhammad announced the merger of four state banks last week and said foreign banks could take a stake in the new entity. But only a day earlier courts had ordered the government to delay closing a bank owned by President Suharto's brother, one of 16 ordered to shut in November.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates January 6	Sterling rates December [illegible]
Australia	2.5466-2.5506	2.5498-2[illegible]
Austria	20.96-20.97	20.75-20[illegible]
Belgium	61.38-61.44	60.56-60[illegible]
Canada	2.331-2.3351	2.3878-2.3[illegible]
Denmark	11.34-11.36	11.24-11[illegible]
France	9.96-9.97	9.88-9[illegible]
Germany	2.9782-2.9813	2.9500-2[illegible]
Hong Kong	12.69-12.70	12.92-12[illegible]
Ireland	1.1682-1.1705	1.1425-1[illegible]
Italy	2,924-2,927	2,895-2,8[illegible]
Japan	219.22-219.42	216.05-21[illegible]
Netherlands	3.3555-3.3586	3.3245-3.3[illegible]
New Zealand	2.8745-2.8795	2.8571-2[illegible]
Norway	12.18-12.20	12.09-12[illegible]
Portugal	304.59-304.90	303.42-30[illegible]
Spain	251.95-252.25	250.21-25[illegible]
Sweden	13.11-13.12	12.91-12[illegible]
Switzerland	2.4190-2.4221	2.3930-2[illegible]
USA	1.6362-1.6390	1.6586-1[illegible]
ECU	1.5060-1.5067	1.4919-1.4[illegible]

FTSE100 Share Index up 242.3 at [illegible]. FT[illegible] Index up 123.6 at 4826.7. Gold down [illegible]

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Massacre Casts a Shadow on Mexico

OPINION
Richard Estrada

WAS THE pre-Christmas massacre of 45 Mexican peasants in southern Mexico just another random snapshot in time, unrelated to that country's past or future? Or was it a frame in a motion picture that is daily building toward a painful and dramatic climax — with ominous implications for U.S. vital interests?

Sorry. It's not a question one is supposed to ask in polite company these days. That's the sense one gets after comparing President Clinton's hand-wringing over the murder of a single political prisoner in Northern Ireland with his muted response to My Lai redux in Mexico. Or when one hears authorities in Mexico City self-righteously denying any responsibility at all. To criticize Mexico is, as it were, *prohibido.*

But in the spirit of the holiday season in Mexico and the Southwest, let's separate the tamales from their wrappings. The heart of the matter surrounding the carnage visited mainly upon the Tzotzil Indian women and children in the village of Acteal, in the state of Chiapas, was that something remains seriously amiss in the social and political structure of Mexico.

The country is increasingly democratic, to be sure. But perceiving the outlines of a mature democracy there still requires the services of a working Hubble telescope.

Some may consider it a bromide to suggest that the Clinton administration should be guided by the evidence as it shepherds the U.S.-Mexico binational relationship. Except that this administration has demonstrated a great capacity for making decisions based solely or mainly on political calculations. And presenting the appearance of smooth sailing is perceived as essential in the context of business support for free trade. Ergo, Clinton's expression of confidence in President Ernesto Zedillo's ability to fully investigate and explain Acteal, which is unwarranted given Zedillo's failure to solve numerous other political crimes and atrocities.

Add to such expediency the White House's penchant for too often playing politics with ambassadorial appointments, and more problems could ensue. Forget the William Weld fiasco for a minute. Clinton continues to hold out the possibility of appointing as ambassador to Mexico someone such as former Houston mayor Bob Lanier. *Bwaynos Dee-oz*, y'all.

But as Mexico continues to tiptoe through the minefield of drugs, corruption, street crime, political assassinations and political reform, Clinton really needs to appoint a professional foreign service officer. That's because it will take an expert to fully grasp a village massacre and a nation's reality.

Though most observers are analyzing Acteal in the context of the Zapatista uprising in the region four years ago, the competition for land and failed peace talks, the reality of Chiapas cannot be wholly separated from that of Mexico in general. Peasant conflicts are but one category in this deadly version of "Wheel of Fortune."

Consider: the murder of a presidential candidate, the killing of a high functionary in President Zedillo's Institutional Revolutionary Party (or PRI), the jailing of Zedillo's handpicked drug czar and the possible corruption of the army's officer corps, a mini-massacre in Ciudad Juarez and the assassinations of various nonpolitical luminaries, including an archbishop, various prosecutors and an occasional law enforcement officer.

Former President Carlos Salinas used to suggest that Mexico was on the verge of becoming a first-world nation. U.S. journalists, including this one, used to buy the assertion hook, line and sinker. But the truth is still a value to be cherished, and the truth is that recurring peasant massacres signal the Guatemalanization of Mexico, even as the simultaneous spread of drug violence and corruption points to its Colombianization.

So appalling was the bloodletting in Chiapas that the government of President Zedillo suddenly finds itself in crisis. Although the Zapatista leadership has accused Zedillo and his interior affairs minister, Ernesto Chuayffet, of responsibility for the slaughter, they were almost certainly not its intellectual authors. But local elected officials of Zedillo's PRI Party allegedly are. Still, in allowing the peace talks with Zapatista rebels to lapse and failing to stay fully informed, Zedillo bears some moral responsibility.

At the beginning of 1998, is the reality of Mexican society as a whole improving? Or are the changes more symbolic than real? In truth, parts of Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Puebla, Ciudad Juarez and a handful of other Mexican cities are modern by anyone's standards.

But Mexico as a country? That is another story. And that story is a screenplay for a movie with an uncertain ending, written partly in the blood of 45 men, women and children from the village of Acteal.



A coffin holding one of the 45 massacred Mexicans is carried to a mass grave PHOTO: ORIANA ELICABE

Green Cards on Offer for $500,000

William Branigin

FOR those with a desire to emigrate and cash to spare, the recent ad in the Times of Oman offered an enticing proposition: "U.S. Green Card for anyone who can show U.S. $500,000."

Green cards for sale? Those coveted documents, which confer legal U.S. resident status and constitute the first step toward citizenship, on the block for cold cash?

What appeared on the face of it to be a dubious offer in fact was based on a little-known — but quite legal — U.S. government program to encourage immigration by wealthy foreign investors. The investor visa program, passed by Congress in 1990 as a way to compete for foreign capital and create U.S. jobs, reserves up to 10,000 green cards a year for investors and their immediate families.

To qualify, the principals must each create at least 10 full-time U.S. jobs by investing $1 million — or $500,000 if the jobs are in certain high-unemployment areas — in setting up a new business, or the rescue or expansion of an existing one. The workers must not be relatives of the investors, but they do not necessarily have to be U.S. citizens.

So far, the program has not really taken off. In recent years, issuances of investor visas have numbered only in the hundreds. In 1996, the latest fiscal year for which figures are available, 936 people received them, including spouses and children. More than 80 percent of the visas went to Asians, mostly from Taiwan, South Korea, China and Hong Kong.

In part because of promotions like the one by a private consulting firm in Oman, however, the investor visa program gradually is becoming better known around the world. Its boosters expect the 1997 numbers to show a sharp increase, perhaps double the 1996 total.

The program has spurred an industry of consultants and facilitators who link investors with business opportunities in the United States, handle the visa applications and even arrange financing for the required investment money. Investors normally must come up with $35,000 to cover various fees, plus at least $100,000 of the minimum capital investment. The firms can then arrange a bank loan for the remaining $400,000 investment amount.

The visa program's advocates argue that it brings in immigrants with needed capital, saves troubled companies and creates or preserves jobs. By contrast, they point out, growing numbers of immigrants who enter the United States under the current system, which stresses family ties, are poor, unskilled and uneducated, and thus often a burden to society.

But critics of the scheme say there is something unsettling about marketing immigrant visas like a commodity. Although the green cards are "conditional" for two years under the program, pending verification that the investment has been made and the jobs created, the transaction is viewed by some as only one step removed from selling U.S. citizenship.

A drawback of permanent resident status is that it subjects the immigrant to U.S. taxes on worldwide income, even if the person does not live full time in the United States. However, the law contains a loophole allowing spouses and children to be the applicants, rather than the family's bread-winner. Many wealthy heads of families choose to remain in their homelands and run their businesses without taking the U.S. tax hit.

Compared with most other family- or employment-based U.S. visa categories, the investor program "is a much faster way of securing a green card," said Brian Telfer, who runs a private immigration consulting firm in Dubai and advertises his services in local newspapers.

Telfer also advertises "second passports from U.S. $75,000," a reference to what he calls "economic citizenship" in such countries as Ireland and several Caribbean and Pacific island states. Of these, he said, Grenada, a former British colony, offers "the best value for money" because its passport affords "visa-free travel" to Canada, Britain and "a number of other First World countries."

Zambia's Personal Politics

EDITORIAL

YOU could say that Kenneth Kaunda, founding father and first and former president of Zambia, provoked some part of the official persecution he is now enduring. He had pressed a hard post-electoral campaign against the man who defeated him in a fair electoral fight, Frederick Chiluba. He accused President Chiluba of stage-managing an aborted coup in October in order to acquire license for a political crackdown. He taunted the police to arrest him, which they finally did early on Christmas Day after his return from an international tour spent bad-mouthing his nemesis. Imprisonment without charges and, after foreign remonstrances, a more benign house arrest followed.

So Mr. Kaunda is no innocent. But neither is he the familiar type of leader who has gone authoritarian and corrupt and who has richly earned a comeuppance. This is Kenneth Kaunda, who for his previous achievements enjoys a dimension of awesomeness few others can claim. In his 27 years as president, he imposed a costly brand of African socialism on Zambia and enforced periods of police-heavy, single-party rule. But he is one of the authentic heroes of the post-World War II African liberation movement. He was willing to pay a heavy price for the sanctions he imposed on then-white-ruled Southern Rhodesia and for the sanctuary he provided freedom-seeking guerrillas; majority rule in Zimbabwe resulted. He could preen, but at a certain moment in history, he acted on a large stage, and well.

No doubt Mr. Kaunda is a tough man to fit into Zambia's erratic struggle against his heritage of uncertain democracy and a centrally directed economy. But it cannot be in the Zambian interest to treat an iconic figure as an enemy of the state. Mr. Chiluba, as the elected president, bears the first responsibility for depersonalizing their political differences and calming things down. On his part, Mr. Kaunda has an elder statesman's obligation to set an example of civility and inclusiveness. A quiet arrangement cries out to be made that will let Mr. Chiluba widen the political space for the Zambian opposition and thus allow Mr. Kaunda to retire gracefully. It cannot be beyond the capacity of either of these men to spare their country their continued strife.

HK Criticized in Battle on 'Bird Flu'

Keith B. Richburg in Hong Kong

AFTER winning praise for presiding over a smooth transition to Chinese rule, and then defending the local currency during Asia's economic collapse, Hong Kong's six-month-old Chinese government has come under surprisingly sharp criticism for its mishandling of a "bird flu" outbreak that has killed four people.

"Incompetence" is how the English-language South China Morning Post described the government's reaction to the avian influenza crisis. "Chaos" was the word used by Apple Daily, Hong Kong's leading Chinese-language newspaper. Added the Chinese-language Sing Pao: "The government's tactics in handling the bird flu case can be described as nonsensical."

Such pointed criticism rarely has been heard here since July 1, when Hong Kong ended 156 years of British colonial rule and rejoined China. But some analysts here believe the current tone reflects a rising popular dissatisfaction with the new administration, as an economic slowdown begins to be felt and as the initial excitement and uncertainty surrounding the return of Hong Kong to China begins to ebb.

"I think basically it's not so much the 'bird flu' thing — it's the general mood of the community," said Joseph Y.S. Cheng, a political scientist at City University of Hong Kong. "The honeymoon period is gone, and [chief executive] C.H. Tung is being assessed more critically. The community's mood is not good because of the situation in the stock market and the real-estate market. For the first time in a long time, people are starting to worry about their jobs in Hong Kong."

The bird flu crisis has tapped into what some believe is a widespread sense that the new government — with a coterie of wealthy businessmen as its top advisers — is "insensitive" to a variety of popular concerns.

For example, during the first week of December, the government ordered 24 Hong Kong high schools to switch from using English to using Cantonese, igniting a firestorm of protest from teachers and parents who want English-language education to continue. The government also announced a plan to bring in foreign workers at a time when Hong Kong residents are fretting about losing their jobs in an anticipated recession this year.

Adding to the "insensitivity" accusation, Tung remained virtually absent when the outbreak erupted in November, never taking to the airwaves to calm the growing panic. He spoke publicly on the issue for the first time on December 31 when he visited a poultry market in the Cheung Sha Wan district — breaking his silence only after four people apparently had died of the disease. Apple Daily wrote a scathing editorial that asked: "What are you doing with your time, Mr. Tung?"

In addition, Health and Welfare Secretary Katherine Fok was on vacation in recent weeks. Health Director Margaret Chan, who has taken a visible, front-line position during the crisis, has been slammed for diminishing the problem by boasting in December that she ate chicken every day — two weeks before she acknowledged that there was indeed a health problem and announced that Hong Kong's estimated 1.3 million chickens would be slaughtered.

Last weekend officials confirmed that a 16th person has been diagnosed with the avian form of influenza known as A H5N1. Five others also may have contracted the disease.

Much of the criticism of the government's handling of the crisis has been aired on talk radio. Politicians have joined in the attacks. The newly formed Citizens Party said last week's slaughter was "unprofessional and disordered." Party head Christine Loh, a popular ousted member of the colonial legislature disbanded on July 1, said, "This operation should have been planned with military precision."



Slaughtered chickens are cleared from a market PHOTO: MARTIN CHAN

Other politicians have suggested the top government officials dealing with the crisis should resign.

The operation to kill the chickens, launched last week, degenerated into chaos when the Agriculture and Fisheries Department acknowledged it had discovered 70,000 chickens in 68 farms it didn't know existed, plus an additional 20,000 birds housed in "chicken hotels" in the remote New Territories area near the border with the rest of China. As the slaughter moved into its sixth day, bags of dead chickens lay uncollected — falling prey to scavenging dogs, cats and rats — and other chickens managed to escape and were seen roaming the streets and through public housing complexes.

Officials were further embarrassed when they were forced to concede that ducks, not chickens, may be the most likely source of the outbreak. Academic reports show that ducks and geese actually carry the virus without showing any symptoms, and officials said the slaughter may be extended to other poultry after tests are completed. The slaughter had included ducks and geese that were in the same quarters as chickens.

Hong Kong residents have been hearing different government stories about the virus, the threat and its origins. And to many, the latest revelation regarding ducks — coming after the mass chicken slaughter — seems like the bureaucratic equivalent of saying: Oops, never mind.

Korea Trains Truth-Telling Accountants

Kevin Sullivan in Seoul

IT WAS cold on the New Year's Eve holiday, so Jung Seung-yong was bundled up in a jacket with a portable heater at his side. He sat alone in the drafty classroom with his calculator, notes and an accounting textbook.

"I want to make some contribution to our country," said Jung, 40, a computer company employee who has been studying for a year in hopes of passing the U.S. certified public accountant exam. "Our markets are going to be open to the whole world, so we need standardized practices."

Accounting may not be chic, but it will be pivotal in determining whether troubled South Korea will be able to pull itself up from financial ruin and regain its place as a world economic power.

The International Monetary Fund has stepped in to rescue the world's 11th-largest economy with a $57 billion emergency bailout. In return, the IMF is demanding that South Korea reform its murky economic practices and become a more "transparent" economy.

In blunter terms, that means South Korea has been told it no longer can cook the books. The IMF is seeking a South Korea in which corporations can't hide debts by keeping a second — or third — ledger far from public view. No more cash in the desk drawer, the IMF has urged, and no more politically influenced bank loans to cronies without a credit check. No more spreading corporate debt around to so many subsidiaries that only the chairman knows for sure whether the company is a million dollars in the black or a billion in the red.

No reform, no IMF bailout — and no future, the bank's negotiators have warned. To prevent that, one of the first things South Korea needs is a few good accountants, and Choi Chang-ho is aiming to fill the need.

Choi, 39, an American-trained certified public accountant (CPA) who has studied at American and Georgetown universities in Washington, runs the Korea Accounting and Information School, one of only two or three private institutions in South Korea offering courses to prepare students to take the notoriously difficult U.S. CPA exam.

"In Korea, we are very secret business people; we keep secret books," said Choi. "But the IMF has said we have to adapt and become more transparent, so people have got to learn the U.S. standards."

South Korea already has plenty of well-trained accountants who have passed the South Korean accounting exam. Most here say that exam is fine but not fully up to the rigorous standard of the U.S. exam, which is generally seen as the international benchmark.

Choi's school has 250 students enrolled. But after the economy went sour and the IMF program was announced last month, the number of applications took off. Ads in local newspapers are getting triple the response they received in November.

When Heartache Takes Too Long to Heal

COMMENT
Ellen Goodman

I DON'T remember when the words first began to echo in the hollow aftermath of loss. But now it seems that every public or private death, every moment of mourning is followed by a call for "healing," a cry for "closure."

Last month, driving home just 24 hours after three Kentucky students were shot dead in a school prayer meeting, I heard a Paducah minister talk about "healing." The three teen-agers had *yet* to be buried, and he said it was time to begin the healing process, as if there were an antibiotic to be applied at the first sign of pain among the survivors.

Weeks later, at a party, a man offered up a worried sigh about a widowed mutual friend. "It's been two years," he said, "and she still hasn't achieved closure." The words pegged her as an underachiever who failed the required course in *Mourning 201*, who wouldn't graduate with her grief class.

This vocabulary of "healing" and "closure" has spread across the post-mortem landscape like a nail across my blackboard. It comes with an intonation of sympathy but an accent of impatience. It suggests, after all, that death is something to be dealt with, that loss is something to get over — according to a prescribed emotional timetable.

It happened again when the Terry Nichols verdict came down. No sooner had the mixed counts of guilty and innocent been announced, than the usually jargon-free Peter Jennings asked how it would help the "healing" for Oklahoma City. Assorted commentators and reporters asked the families whether they felt a sense of "closure."

The implicit expectation, even demand, was that the survivors of 168 deaths would traverse a similar emotional terrain and come to the finish line at the same designated time. Was two and a half years too long to mourn a child blown up in a building?

It was the families themselves that set us straight with responses as personal and diverse as one young mother who said, "It's time to move on," and another who described her heart this way: "Sometimes I feel like it's bleeding."

In the Nichols' sentencing trial last week, we got another rare sampling of raw grief. Laura Kennedy testified that in the wake of her son's death in 1995, "I have an emptiness inside of me that's there all the time." Diane Leonard said that since her husband's death her life "has a huge hole that can't be mended."

I do not mean to suggest that the people who testified were "typical" mourners or the Oklahoma bombing a "typical" way of death. I mean to suggest that grief is always atypical — as individual as the death and the mourner.

The American way of dealing with it, however, has turned grieving into a set process with rules, stages, and of course deadlines. We have, in essence, tried to make a science of grief, to tuck messy emotions under neat clinical labels — like "survivor guilt" or "detachment."

Sometimes, we confuse sadness with depression, replace comfort with Prozac. We expect, maybe insist upon, an end to grief. Trauma, pain, detachment, acceptance in a year — Time's up.

But in real lives, grief is a train that doesn't run on anyone else's schedule. Jimmie Holland, at New York's Sloan-Kettering Hospital, who has studied the subject, knows that "normal grief may often be an ongoing lifelong process." Indeed, she says, "The expectation of healing becomes an added burden. We create a sense of failure. We hear people say, 'I can't seem to reach closure, I'm not doing it fast enough.'"

Surely it is our own anxiety in the presence of pain, our own fear of loss and death, that makes us wish away another's grief or hide our own. But in every life losses will accumulate like stones in a backpack. We will all be caught at times between remembrance and resilience.

So whatever our passion for emotional efficiency, for quality-time parents and one-minute managers, there simply are no one-minute mourners. Hearts heal faster from surgery than from loss. And when the center of someone's life has been blown out like the core of a building, is it any wonder if it takes so long even to find a door to close?

Democracy on the March Across East Asia

Keith B. Richburg in Kuala Lumpur

IN SOUTH KOREA, a veteran pro-democracy campaigner and longtime political outsider triumphed in the presidential elections last month. In Taiwan last November, the ruling Nationalist Party suffered its biggest defeat ever in local elections, presaging a possible loss of power in this year's national elections for a new parliament.

In the Philippines, a revived "people power" movement and vociferous media criticism forced President Fidel Ramos to abandon thoughts of running for another term, while in Thailand popular protests and media pressure forced an unpopular prime minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, to relinquish his office last November and retire to the political sidelines.

Even in tightly controlled Indonesia there are discernible stirrings of discontent and change. President Suharto is set to be anointed this year to a seventh consecutive five-year term, but already there is open talk about the "post-Suharto era." The question now, say Indonesian analysts and journalists, and foreign diplomats there, is not whether the vast archipelago will democratize, but at what pace and in what manner.

For most of the past three decades, East Asia has been known largely as a region of miraculous economic growth but stilted political development, with most countries led by military regimes, autocratic strongmen, or all-powerful ruling parties that kept power through money, patronage and a measured amount of repression. Yet recent events are converging to challenge some of the old certainties, upending some long-held political orthodoxies.

Just as the regionwide economic slowdown has called into question the Asian "miracle," so too have recent democratic stirrings tested the much-repeated axiom that Asians care little about democracy and favor authoritarian government.

A few regional leaders — Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa in Hong Kong and China's Communist leaders — still advocate the idea of "Asian values," a system that prizes stability and consensus while eschewing Western-style democracy with its emphasis on political conflict.

Kim Dae-jung's win in South Korea marks a big step forward for democracy PHOTO: YUN SUK-BONG

But a more complex reality is emerging, with more and more Asians now choosing their own leaders, throwing out old ones, forming labor unions and advocacy groups outside of government control and publicly clamoring for more democratic rights. Just as democracy swept through Latin America and the former Communist-run states of Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War, East Asia, too, is in the midst of what many here are calling a slow but steady move toward more pluralism and openness.

"The trend is towards greater democratization," said Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a political scientist with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences in Jakarta. "There is increasing societal pressure in every country. This relates to the fact that people are getting more education. It's the rise of the middle class. And it's also a result in the increased globalization of communication and travel. The wave of democratization since the end of the Cold War seems to be catching everybody."

"Democracy is on the march in East Asia," said Douglas Paal, president of the Asia Pacific Policy Center in Washington. "But the problem is, it's hard to notice because all we tend to listen to are the booming voices of the Mahathirs" — a reference to Malaysia's outspoken leader. Paal called democratization "an inevitability in the region" that will only be reinforced as more countries are forced to liberalize and open their economies as a condition for international aid.

One sign of the trend can be seen in the heavy electoral calendar. South Koreans went to the polls last month for their third free presidential election since 1987. After voting in local elections in November, Taiwanese — who emerged from martial law only in 1986 — will vote this year for a new national parliament.

Filipinos will elect a new president in May, further consolidating the democracy restored by the 1986 "people power" revolt that tossed out dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Thailand is likely to hold its first elections under a new reformist constitution aimed at cleaning up "money politics" and reducing the role of patronage in the country's ailing system.

HONG KONG will elect its first legislature under Chinese rule, which, despite complaints about the fairness of the rules and the size of the voting franchise, will make the territory the most democratic part of China.

With so many Asian countries now voting for leaders it seems difficult to argue anymore that Asians in general don't care about democracy.

"It's nonsense," Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui said, commenting on the "Asian values" concept. "Asian people are human beings . . . Democracy is something everybody would like to have. Everybody would like more freedom."

Now academics, journalists, diplomats and others point to a number of trends that they say shows democracy is becoming more entrenched. They are:

- The declining role of the armed forces. This trend has been most remarkable in South Korea, but also in Thailand, Taiwan and the Philippines — where the armed forces once exercised broad control but where the chance of a coup now seems remote.
- In Indonesia, the military still exercises wide influence through its "dual function" role allowing officers to also hold government jobs. But analysts in Jakarta say they see a trend toward a more professional, less politicized, military.
- The growth of nongovernmental organizations. Indonesia is believed to have around 10,000 advocacy organizations, ranging from women's groups to human rights forums and labor unions, which are not officially recognized. The trend is similar, if less pronounced, across much of East and Southeast Asia. These groups have begun to exert influence on government policies concerning specific issues.
- The rise of information technology and the aggressiveness of the media. The Internet, satellite television, and regional publications that circulate freely across borders give Asians greater access to uncensored information about global democratic trends than at any time in history.
- The emergence of a new leadership generation. In Malaysia, Mahathir's heir apparent, deputy prime minister and finance minister Anwar Ibrahim, 50, talks of the need for greater democracy. Anwar, who learned his politics as a 1970s street activist jailed for protesting against an earlier, repressive Malaysian government, is widely seen as a prototype of the "new breed" Asian leader — more cosmopolitan and less concerned than older leaders about their nations' survivability and political stability.

"There's a whole crowd of these guys in a lot of countries," said Paal, of the Asia Pacific Policy Center. ". . . The generational change to me is the most important thing."

Many regional analysts and academics agreed that Asia's economic downturn may in the short term pose a challenge to the democratization trend. The pain of higher unemployment, high interest rates and slower growth, all part of the IMF's prescription for ailing economies, may produce a populist electoral backlash against democratic governments and a hankering for the older-style authoritarian leader who provided the "iron rice bowl" of prosperity for the previous generation.

But for the long term, the changes in the economic systems forced by the IMF remedies — more transparency in decision-making, opening of markets, less corruption and cronyism — are likely to accelerate the move to pluralism in politics, analysts said.

There are, of course, a few exceptions to this trend. Burma is still run by a military junta that refuses to recognize the National League for Democracy as the party that won national elections in 1990.

Communist-run Vietnam also seems to be lagging behind. But in one possible sign of nascent change, non-Communist candidates won seats for the first time in Vietnam's most recent elections for a new national assembly.

Cambodia was thought to have ushered in a new democratic government after U.N.-brokered elections. For a while, newspapers flourished, human rights groups opened offices and political parties sprang up. But last July the powerful second prime minister, Hun Sen, staged a bloody coup and seized control of the country.

Response to the Cambodian coup was notable. In the past, regional leaders clung to the notion of noninterference in each other's internal affairs. The ASEAN regional meeting last July marked a turning point. The Asian leaders lined up to criticize the coup and demand free elections.

Colleges Take Sides in Cola Wars

Valerie Strauss

GEORGETOWN University is about to become Coke country, and the University of Maryland will be Pepsi land under exclusive distribution contracts the giant soda companies are promoting as part of their escalating, nationwide "cola wars." College and cola officials say the agreements forged in these corporate showdowns benefit everybody — except for the loyal drinkers of the soda that loses out.

In arrangements devised here and on college campuses across the country, Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola get exclusive market access to thousands of consumers and, in some cases, the right to advertise soda and other company products on campus. The schools, in turn, eager for help with ever-rising college costs, get millions of dollars in extra revenue simply for choosing one product over another.

"Most corporations do it every day, but a lot of colleges and universities have just begun realizing that we need to streamline and be more efficient, and this is one way to do that," said Margie Bryant, Georgetown University's vice president for auxiliary services. "We call it low-lying fruit — things we can grab and take advantage of when nobody is going to notice a difference."

The deal with Coca-Cola Co. will bring Georgetown, with 12,600 students, $6.5 million in scholarship and other aid over 10 years. The University of Maryland at College Park, with more than 30,000 students, will receive a whopping $57.7 million from PepsiCo Inc. over 15 years.

George Washington University is in its third year of a five-year contract with Pepsi, though officials there won't discuss how much the agreement is worth. Some schools, such as Howard University in Washington and the University of Virginia, still offer a choice of cola beverages, but Howard hasn't ruled out the possibility of selling exclusive distribution rights to one of the rivals.

"It's an increasingly competitive business, where frankly the stakes are rising," said Larry Jabbonsky, spokesman for PepsiCo. "From where Pepsi sits, it's the best of both worlds. We make a substantial commitment to higher education. But at the same time, this makes a tight, enduring connection with the core of our audience, teens and young adults. It works out as part philanthropy, part altruism and part business development."

The money paid to colleges under these marketing contracts, which the cola companies also have negotiated with high school districts, cannot be written off as tax deductions.

Colleges long have contracted with specific companies to provide certain services, such as food or paper products. Georgetown, for example, recently signed an exclusive contract with Xerox Corp. that will save the university up to $1.2 million annually on copying, Bryant said.

But deals involving cherished consumer products are a touchier issue, and there was apprehension initially among students at Georgetown and George Washington.

"We were concerned that any time the university creates an agreement with just one company, it limits student choice," said Georgetown Student Association President John Cronan.

Thirty years ago, such a move might have sparked a sit-in by students protesting that their school was selling out to corporate America. But college students today see other factors as being more important. "Ultimately, the deal meant a lot of money for Georgetown University," Cronan concluded.

"The students would love to have both [Coke and Pepsi] . . . but it's just the reality of the situation," said Kuyomars Golparvar, a student leader at George Washington University. "If they want a Coke, they can go across the street off campus and get one."

The soda contracts at colleges around town have different provisions. At Georgetown, only Coke and its affiliated products will be sold on campus. The University of Maryland's proposed contract with Pepsi allows some sale of competing Coca-Cola products at campus convenience stores.

At George Washington University, where Pepsi has an exclusive franchise, school officials say they must ask Pepsi for permission to use any non-Pepsi beverage products. Pepsi has the final word — which almost always is no.

ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY RUSSO

Hanging With His Homeboys

Jonathan Yardley

BARNEY'S VERSION
By Mordecai Richler
Knopf. 355 pp. $25

THIS IS Mordecai Richler's 10th novel in a long, productive career that has established him, along with the likes of Robertson Davies and Margaret Atwood, among the principal figures of the postwar Canadian literary scene, which is considerably livelier than is commonly understood. Like most of its predecessors, Barney's Version is set in and about the Montreal Jewish community of St. Urbain Street and draws heavily upon its author's experiences. It is funny and engaging, and Richler's admirers will not want to miss it, but somewhat more objective readers are likely to sense that Richler has revisited familiar ground once too often.

It is something of an oversimplification, but Richler is at heart a comic writer. This is not to say that he eschews serious themes but that he usually finds humor in them. Although he writes often about men and women and the romantic misadventures that befall them, he is especially interested in men in groups. Over and over again he returns to a small, bumptious gang of men — young ones, as his own career began, now old ones — who grew up together on St. Urbain Street. They are almost mirror images of the male Jewish Baltimoreans whom Barry Levinson portrayed in his film Diner: smart, funny hell-raisers rebelling against their parents and convention even as they seek their own places in the world of wives and children and jobs.

Barney Panofsky, the eponymous protagonist — hero, too, in his fashion — of Barney's Version, is 67 years old but, like any good St. Urbain Street boy, still drinks too much and chases skirts and does deals of dubious propriety. Yet his energy is directed more toward the past than the present, "rewinding the spool of my wasted life, wondering how I got from there to here," as he goes about writing "my one and only story, and I'm going to tell it exactly how I please." He claims that he has "only insults to avenge and injuries to nurse," and indeed plenty of that takes place, but the mood is more Decembral than vengeful, as Barney looks back fondly on the lost Montreal of his youth and as he pines for his third wife, Miriam, whom he adores but who finally had more of his demands and inattention than she could stomach.

Barney's Version is a sprawling, amiable book in which it is not difficult to get lost. Characters, some clearly important, arrive and then depart for so long that they are forgotten, leaving the reader to wonder, when they reappear, precisely who they are. The death of an old pal, Bernard "Boogie" Moscovitch, is meant to be the story's central episode — Barney is accused, and exonerated, of his murder — but there are extended periods in which his name is scarcely mentioned. Ditto for others ostensibly important to Barney yet never really brought into clear focus in this ramble through the old man's life. It is a problem of which Barney, i.e., Richler, is disarmingly aware:

"Last night I made a big mistake. I reread some of the crap I've written in what I've come to grandly consider my very own Apologia pro Vita Sua, with a tip of my chapeau to Cardinal Newman. Digressions, or what I prefer to think of as Barney Panofsky's table talk, abound. But Laurence Sterne got away with it, so why not me? Count your blessings. Readers don't have to wait until the end of volume three before I'm even born. Something else. It doesn't take me six pages to cross a field, as it would if this had been Thomas Hardy. I rein in my metaphors, unlike John Updike. I am admirably succinct when it comes to descriptive passages, unlike P.D. James, a writer I happen to admire."

That is a deft passage, but it points to another aspect of this novel that is likely to confuse some readers: It is a highly literary novel about a distinctly nonliterary man.

As it happens, the other elements of the book are sufficiently interesting to carry it by themselves: Barney's failures with all three of his wives, his business dealings, his friendships and enmities, his ambitions and frustrations. He may not be a very nice guy, but it's easy to sympathize with him and to care about him. Yet even though he readily acknowledges the discursiveness of his book, that disclaimer is not enough to straighten matters out. The pleasures of a ramble are not to be taken lightly, but there are too many times in Barney's Version when one is left to wonder where, exactly, this particular ramble is headed.

Rosemary's Baby Grows Into a Joke

Douglas E Winter

SON OF ROSEMARY
By Ira Levin
Dutton. 255 pp. $22.95

THIRTY years ago, the novel Rosemary's Baby brought a new and discomforting edge to the emerging paranoia of the American '60s. It was an instant classic — and a bestseller. Its young author, Ira Levin, had cast the first stone of a coming landslide in popular fiction: the mass-marketed novel of supernatural horror.

Rosemary's Baby is an exceptional novel and worth rereading. Rosemary Reilly, a blissfully naive Midwesterner and recently lapsed Catholic, ventures to Manhattan, marries a handsome but struggling actor and moves into a charming apartment, where her hopes of becoming the wife and mother of the American Dream are not merely shattered but defiled: Her conniving husband and a coven of elderly Satanists beguile her into sleeping with Lucifer and bearing the Son of Darkness. Deftly told, the novel works as a thriller, a cautionary parable and a striking commentary on a time when the roles of women, and our elders, were being questioned and changing.

A sequel is usually a risky business, and it is rare for a writer to revisit territory left unexplored for decades. Son Of Rosemary seeks to resolve the question left unanswered in the final pages of Rosemary's Baby: Why? As his title suggests, Levin is not taking things too seriously, which, in retrospect, seems a mistake. Son Of Rosemary proceeds with a nod-and-wink sense of artifice, forgoing the ambition of its predecessor in favor of amusement.

The plot is suitably preposterous: In November 1999, Rosemary awakens in a hospital bed, the victim of a coma that has claimed 20-odd years of her life, courtesy of the coven that helped sire her infamous baby. She soon learns that the child, Andrew, has grown into Mr. Perfect, a dashing multimillionaire and philanthropist. He is the head of God's Children, a multinational foundation dedicated to world peace; and, he assures Rosemary, he has overcome the stain of Daddy Darkest.

Rosemary's man has conceived the ultimate showbiz gesture to mark the new millennium: On December 31 1999, everyone in the world will light a candle to honor peace. Is there something devilish in his grin? Might the special candles spawn some deadly toxin intended to wipe out the human race? Or is Rosemary merely paranoid?

Actually, dear Rosemary is clueless, and her character soon puts a strain on the reader's patience. After all, this is the woman who was duped into becoming Lucifer's bedmate; surely she would be less gullible this time around. Try though Levin may to justify her refusal to see the truth, he simply can't convince the reader that Rosemary is anything but a fool.

Like the original novel, Son Of Rosemary hinges on a riddle that, on this occasion, Levin declines to solve for the reader. Add in the jovial style and the accomplished sleight-of-hand at the finale, and there's a sense that we've been told a shaggy — goat? — story.

The Unpleasant Shape of Things to Come

Sven Birkerts

TOWARD THE END OF TIME
By John Updike
Knopf. 334pp. $25

BORN just after midcentury — in 1954 — Ben Turnbull, John Updike's journal-keeping narrator in Toward The End Of Time, is a dyspeptic 66 in 2020, the year he succumbs to the notational impulse. In that same year, God willing, I will be three years older, a fact I mention right away because I could not read Updike's novel without making constant reflexive projections. I picture myself as citizen, man, father, sexual being, brooder . . . Ben, Sven; now, then. And I'll say just this: If my life — my soul — ever resembles this man's, I hope I'll have the grace to do what military people once called "the honorable thing."

Ben is a pathetic human being, and Updike's novel offers little for the serious reader. The first statement does not entail the second — one could write a powerful novel about a reprehensible individual. No, Ben is pathetic and the book fails because Updike does not know what to do about it. The reader, his moral instincts affronted, has to wonder if the author could see what he was bringing to life.

The novel is composed of journal entries representing a year in the life. Ben is long retired from investment work in Boston; his alert intelligence is underemployed, he surveys with a cold eye the detente that is his marriage to Gloria — a hale warrior certain to outlive him by many years — and makes withering sidelong comments about the world as he now finds it, "now" being some years after a Sino-U.S. conflagration that has wreaked untold destruction. "Few of the Chinese missiles made it this far . . . ," he observes, "but . . . the collapse of the economy has taken a terrible physical toll." Ben surveys "rusty stumps of projected construction that had been abruptly abandoned, as too expensive for our dwindled, senile world." Dwindled, senile . . . As Wallace Stevens wrote: "One must have a mind of winter/ To regard the frost . . ."

We soon suspect that the larger world has become coextensive with Ben's sense of himself.

And what an unpleasant self that is! Those who regard women as worthy to walk beside men will twig early on to the fact that Ben is a pig. That he has retained his outlook despite coming of age in the great era of liberation is a testament to the durability of his prejudices. But running deeper still is Ben's narcissism. We stand aghast, finally, at his inability to accommodate anything beyond the clamor of his sexual impulses and the labored preciosity of his naturalist observations and musings.

The journal's year is scarcely under way before Ben is indulging in an extended fantasy: Gloria is dead from a shotgun blast, maybe even by Ben's hand. In her place is Deirdre, a feisty hooker who charges for her sexual favors but ultimately seems to be falling for his . . . charms. Deirdre is the occasion for reflections like this:

"Deirdre is becoming a little too familiar. Instead of submitting to my sexual whims, she prefers to give one the benefit of her feminist rage. 'Why are men so cruel?' she asks soulfully, with a little-girl rustle of her head on my shoulder. 'Natural selection,' I tell her. 'The killers survive, the killed drop out of the genetic pool.'"

THIS is the same Ben, by the way, who can stand stunned before some Siberian irises, noting "their complexly folded heads of imperial purple left on slender stems above the matted jumble of long leaves whose emergence as individual fleurs-de-lys I so eagerly noted not many weeks ago." This indicates a radical dissociation between perceptual and affective — never mind moral — centers.

But Ben's treatment of women may not be the worst of his failings. The fact is that he is living in baronial comfort on Boston's North Shore after a nuclear conflict has killed millions on both sides; has decimated America as a nation; has obliterated a great part of the life that we are all sweetly savoring at this moment — and he feels nothing. No keening impulse, nada. Ben's empathic nerve is dead — there is no life in his immediate relationship — but dead also is that essential larger susceptibility, that which cherishes the past and spins the narrative of history. When Ben does refer back to the America once inventoried so fondly by Harry Angstrom, Updike's Rabbit, he does so obliquely, without emotion. "With the plains a radioactive dust bowl," he writes, "decimated Midwestern cities have been living on truckloads of New England mussels and apples from New York State." The sentence tells us everything we need to know. The man is more concerned about the dribble of his urine than the decline of the West.

But Updike is one of our great artists. Surely he will not let this monster of self prevail. And indeed, late in the novel Ben discloses a diagnosis of prostate cancer. We glimpse a path of redemptive suffering: He may yet —

I will banish the suspense: He does not. Ben limps into partial recovery, a diminished, sexually inoperative man. There is no narrative tug, no direction. We have only the drone of his personality — his dim affections and fading lusts, his reveries and imaginings.

Mafias profit from illegal immigrants

Salvatore Aloise in Rome

THE anti-Mafia section of the public prosecutor's office in the southern Italian port of Reggio di Calabria decided on December 29 to open an inquiry into the fate of the Ararat, a cargo boat that had run aground off the Calabrian coast two days earlier with 835 Kurdish men, women and children on board.

Investigators are looking for proof of what already seems to be highly likely: that the local Mafia, the *'ndrangheta*, has begun trafficking in a new line of goods — illegal immigrants. Two other inquiries, started more than a year ago when the first wave of immigrants began arriving in the region, are believed to have reached the same conclusion.

The Calabrian godfathers are overseeing operations. More particularly, they arranged for the cargo crewmen's getaway. The dinghy used by the four men who had piloted the Ararat was found between Locri and Siderno, two ports in Reggio di Calabria where there is a strong Mafia presence.

According to investigators, no one would be able to come ashore safely at night, with large sums of money, in that kind of area without enjoying the protection of local organised crime.

What is certain is that the men who abandoned the ageing Ararat with its human cargo had a great deal of money on them. Kurds taken in by the Calabrian authorities are beginning to talk. Theirs is a story of distress, humiliation, deprivation and inhuman conditions endured during a six-day trip for which they paid through the nose.

Each of them had to stump up about $3,000 for the voyage on which they had pinned so much hope. According to an initial calculation by the Italian authorities, the criminal organisation that handles this kind of traffic between Turkey and Italy via Greece made about $3 million out of the operation.

Even allowing for "expenses", such as the purchase of the Ararat, a Lebanese cargo boat believed to have cost $250,000, that still left the organisers with an impressively high net profit.

Investigators found clues on board the Ararat as to the two possible routes it took to Italy: one ending up in Santa Maria di Leuca, in the southeastern province of Puglia, and the other — the route it took — with the Calabrian coast as its destination.

Anti-Mafia magistrates in the public prosecutor's office in Bari, which is in the front line of such traffic, say this confirms the existence of a pact between the various mafias guaranteeing each of them a slice of the cake.

Italian investigators recently travelled to the Albanian capital Tirana to try to trace one of the networks to the top. There can be no doubt the organisation is a powerful one: it can, for example, allow people to travel on credit by relying on its powers of intimidation. It would appear that several passengers on the Ararat had not paid their full fare.

Experts are only half-surprised by this new line in crime. A 1995 report by the national anti-Mafia department hinted clearly that organised crime was likely to find a new niche in the traffic of illegal immigrants. Pierluigi Vigna, the national prosecutor in charge of anti-Mafia operations, confirmed on December 29 that the network concerned had international ramifications and suggested that the various criminal groups were extraordinarily skilled at adapting to "market" needs.

That process of diversification is now under way. They deal not only in tobacco, weapons and drugs but in human beings, a traffic that is all the more profitable because it carries fewer risks from a penal point of view.

The various branches of the organisation are thought to specialise in different sectors. The Albanians still carry people from their country across the Strait of Otranto in powerful speedboats capable of giving Italian navy patrols the slip. It is a phenomenon that has been less in the headlines recently, but continues to thrive, with a veritable shuttle service operating each night.



A fishing boat begins ferrying migrants ashore from the grounded Turkish cargo ship Ararat last week PHOTOGRAPH PAONE

The Turkish mafia deals with mass "consignments" of 300-400 people, who bring in an average of $1.5 million per trip. There were several such voyages in 1997, the biggest coming on November 2 when almost 800 illegal immigrants arrived in Santa Maria di Leuca.

The Kurds who arrived after Christmas are still undergoing identification procedures with a view to their possible deportation. Some were arrested on December 29 several hundred kilometres from their point of arrival as they were making their way on foot to northern Italy in the hope of crossing over into France and Germany. As a result, current legislation covering deportation has once again been called into question.

Any deportation order is enforceable only within two weeks of its issue. This allows the person concerned plenty of time to vanish into thin air. Legislation is due to be tightened up, but parliament still has to give its approval.

The debate has been hotting up. The possibility of granting refugee status to the Kurds is being looked into. The interior ministry has announced that applications for political asylum will be scrupulously examined. Many have called for the whole Kurdish problem to be debated at European level and for some joint initiative to be taken.

(December 31)

Vietnamese reshuffle favours conservatives

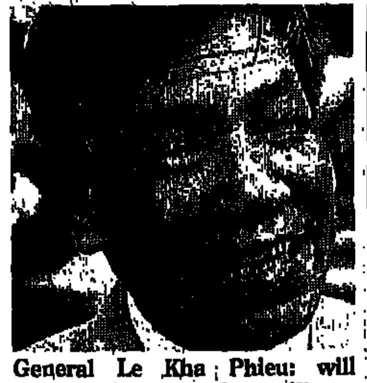
Jean-Claude Pomonti in Bangkok

RESHUFFLES of Vietnam's Communist party leadership are always the result of jockeying for power by its various ill-defined factions. The appointment on December 29 of General Le Kha Phieu to succeed Do Muoi as the general secretary of the party was no exception to the rule.

Phieu, aged 66, comes from the north of the country. In September, Vietnam's newly elected parliament appointed a civilian from the centre, Tran Duc Luong, as president and another civilian, "southerner" Phan Van Khai, as prime minister.

The main surprise was that it was a central committee plenum session organised to review economic matters, rather than a party congress, which replaced the ailing Muoi, aged 80. The appointment of Phieu, who used to run the army's influential department of political affairs, will preserve the interests of the military and act as a guarantee for the conservative camp — Luong and Khai are thought to want to revive Vietnam's flagging growth rate by liberalising the economy.





General Le Kha Phieu: will preserve interests of the military

After two years of negotiations, the troika that had governed Vietnam since 1991 — Muoi, Le Duc Anh and Vo Van Kiet — has given a younger team the task of dragging Vietnam into the 21st century.

But a close eye will be kept on the transition process: the three elders are now special advisers to the party's central committee. Now as before, the communist leadership will rule by consensus.

"When your stomach is full, you have to stop eating," Muoi told journalists querying him on the pace of liberalisation on November 20. The party will probably continue to greet policy suggestions from the reformist camp with scepticism.

Although donor countries pledged on December 12, in Tokyo, to grant Hanoi an aid package of $2.4 billion in 1998, there are strings attached.

According to the World Bank, Vietnam's 1997 growth rate was between 7.5 and 8.5 per cent (instead of the 9.5 per cent forecast). It could slump to 5 per cent in 1998. Foreign investment has dropped from $8.7 billion in 1996 to $5 billion in 1997.

This prompted Lee Kuan Yew, the Singaporean patriarch, to point out during a trip to Vietnam at the beginning of December that foreign investors were taking the risk of losing their capital while they waited for the Vietnamese government to offer them conditions that would enable them to get a decent return.

The Asian crisis has so far had little effect on Vietnam because its currency, the dong, is not convertible. It suffered a de facto devaluation of only 10 per cent. But Vietnam could be hit by the after-effects of the crisis early in 1998. South Korea, Japan and Taiwan alone account for one-third of the $30 billion of foreign investment allowed since 1990.

The main reason for the leadership reshuffle would seem to be a desire to preserve its internal equilibrium. "If the World Bank and the IMF make excessive demands, Vietnam won't be able to afford to meet them," Muoi said in November.

(December 30)

A cry to end exclusion from society

EDITORIAL

FRANCE has seen a wave of demonstrations by the jobless in the past few weeks. There were earlier attempts, in the 1980s, to mobilise the jobless. But now that unemployment has become a mass phenomenon, the unrest is taking place on a much bigger scale.

Taking advantage of the festive season, those who have been excluded from work have been making demands that are certain to elicit a sympathetic response from the public.

The associations behind the movement — which are supported by the CGT trade union and by activists in the CFDT trade union that oppose its official policy — have called for a "Christmas bonus" for the unemployed and an increase in minimum income-support payments. Their mobilisation represents a challenge to management, organised labour, the government and the country.

In French society, the jobless have no status and no means of applying pressure. Unlike lorry-drivers, they cannot defend their interests by bringing road traffic to a halt.

Even if wage-earners' trade unions say they care about the fate of the unemployed, they are organisations that chiefly represent those in work and give priority to those who are "included", rather than those who have been excluded.

The gradual calling into question of the rights of the jobless since the early 1990s and the controversial reform of the financing of Unedic [which handles unemployment benefit schemes] are both part of that process.

The current movement, which has seen the first stirrings of a collective organisation of the unemployed, has grown out of a new awareness that could well have a profound effect on the trade-union world.

Seven months after Lionel Jospin's success at the polls, the government is faced with a highly symbolic issue. It is now coming under fire for the way it has responded to the so-called "social fracture".

The battle against unemployment cannot be properly waged by taking economic decisions alone; it also needs to comprise social provision. The creation of jobs for young people, the 35-hour working week and the raising of the purchasing power of those in work may eventually succeed in rolling back unemployment. But right now the terrible predicament of those hit by recession must be dealt with.

It is surely high time we gave our redistribution system a thorough rethink. If the French government wants to avoid having to deal with a rebellion by those who have been left out in the cold, it will have to grasp the nettle.

(December 31)

Sterilisation drive alarms Peruvian women

Nicole Bonnet in Lima

THE setting is almost always the same: there are banners proclaiming "a great health festival", a band playing on a rostrum and placards bearing the words — in Spanish — "Free: Fallopian tubes tied and vasectomy".

But in many of the little Andean villages, most of the people in the crowd speak only Quechua, and a majority of women are illiterate anyway. As soon as they step off the lorry that has brought them in for the Sunday market, a nurse invites them to go to the community clinic.

There, children are vaccinated, while their mothers, without really realising why or how, emerge with their Fallopian tubes tied. Do they actually give their consent? When the nurse asks them: "Do you really want to have as many children as guinea-pigs?" they answer with a vigorous "No!"

That is enough for the state. Within 10 minutes the free operation has been performed.

Lourdes Flores, a member of parliament who attended one such "festival of health", was outraged. She has revealed to Congress a ministry of health document that lists the various perks available to ministry staff who achieve birth control targets set by the government.

Criticism of Peru's birth control policy is not new. But since it has up to now come from the Catholic Church, public opinion has not been overly roused, attributing it to the Church's traditional condemnation of contraception.

This time, however, it was at the third National Congress of Peasant and Indian Women that there was an avalanche of protests, which were picked up by the Peasants' Trade Union, women's organisations, feminists and opposition members of parliament.

The daily newspaper El Comercio conducted a wide-ranging investigation and produced evidence from the poorest parts of the country which confirmed that women were agreeing to have their Fallopian tubes tied in exchange for food and health care for their youngest children.



Critics charge that Peruvian peasants are being sterilised against their will — PHOTOGRAPH: JUDITH CAUL

The paper explained that the state paid for the operation, but that if things went wrong it washed its hands of any responsibility. Nine-year-old Maria, the eldest of three children, told the paper: "My mother got scared and hid when Miss Rita [the obstetrician at Tocache Hospital] came to fetch her. But they took her away the next day."

Another woman, also operated on, was present when the obstetrician said to Maria's mother: "So your husband is against the idea? That doesn't matter — we'll do it straight away and he won't know a thing." She duly went home and lay down, never to get up again: 10 days later she was dead.

Bernadina Alva, aged 26, gave her consent because of the inducements — clothes, shoes and food. "They told us that it was free, and that we wouldn't feel anything. So we let them do it." Some women even signed a piece of paper authorising the operation because they had been told that if they did not do so they would not in future be allowed to have their baby in hospital.

The deputy health minister, Alejandro Aguinaga, was forced to admit to Congress recently that pressure had indeed been applied by health personnel. But, he added, they were simply cases of misunderstanding or regrettable overzealousness on the part of certain doctors.

Aguinaga insisted, however, that the family planning policy had been an undeniable success: in 1997 it had allowed 900,000 couples to guard against an unwanted pregnancy. He said that during the year 100,000 women had their Fallopian tubes tied and 10,000 men had undergone vasectomy operations, all of them willingly, while 3 million contraceptive pills and 10 million condoms had also been distributed.

Richard Clinton, a United States expert on the subject, said: "What can be criticised in this whole affair is the fact that the sterilisation campaign is not transparent." Despite official denials, Clinton is quite positive when he asserts that clinics are forced to keep to monthly quotas. That explains the end-of-month rush, when any failure to meet targets can result in staff being laid off.

Arturo Salazar, a member of parliament, has noted that in pilot districts the quotas are even displayed on clinics' noticeboards, not far from posters praising the decision of a couple that has decided to live "happily" thanks to the wife's Fallopian tubes being tied.

Aguinaga is not too worried that women may not always really want the operation carried out: "What happens is that people sometimes complain for the sake of complaining," he said. "That's the way we Peruvians are."

(January 2)

It's official – chocolate is good for you

Henri Chaveron

CHOCOLATE is an extraordinary food. Its psycho-sensorial and pharmacological components steal the limelight compared with its nutritional content, whose only difference from other foods is an exceptionally high calorie content.

At first sight, the main attraction of chocolate to humans would seem to be its aroma and taste. But the "pseudo-compulsive" behaviour and craving that it creates in certain consumers, as well as the psycho-physiological symptoms that apparently follow its ingestion, mean that growing importance is now being attached to its pharmacological qualities.

The history of chocolate is littered with claims that it has stimulative, anti-depressant, "anti-stress" and aphrodisiac qualities. Claims of that kind do not normally stand up to scrutiny. But in the case of chocolate those claims seem to have been gradually confirmed.

From the second half of the 19th century on, its stimulative action was correlated with the presence of alkaloids in cacao beans, such as theobromine and caffeine. Theobromine acts on the heart, brain and muscles like caffeine, but in a less direct way.

However, work has revealed that chocolate affects sexual behaviour, anxiety and peace of mind.

The role played in those cases by psychoactive substances present in chocolate, such as biogenic or excitatory amines, and in particular one such amine, phenylethylamine (PEA), has been highlighted.

While scientists see no more than a behavioural analogy between PEA and amphetamines (the receptors in the hypothalamus are identical in both cases), others believe they can explain the craving for chocolate sometimes observed in people subject to occasional depression. In their view, chocolate is used as an unconscious self-medication.

Israeli researchers at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem came up with findings in 1983 that would seem to support the theory that chocolate has "aphrodisiac virtues" — a theory that has been kept alive for the past 500 years by numerous literary and medical authors. The findings showed that when rats were given PEA, they copulated.

Salsolinol, on the other hand, has been largely ignored. This alkaloid, present in chocolate in large quantities, is interesting because its marked anti-depressant profile could well be responsible for effects attributed to PEA. It also encourages an increase in the level of PEA by inhibiting the enzyme that regulates it.

A new group of compounds was recently found in cacao by a team at the Neurosciences Institute in San Diego, California. They consist of anandamide, a neurotransmitter that acts on the endogenous system of cannabinoid receptors in the brain, and two other related molecules (N-acylethanoamines).

THE EFFECTS of this group are the same as those observed in people who have consumed cannabis, chiefly a heightening of the sensations and euphoria. The N-acylethanoamines supplied by cacao raise anandamide levels and thus increase cannabinoid effects. The craving for chocolate observed in those who regularly eat large amounts of it could be explained by a dependence like that experienced by cannabis users.

A team at the toxicological department of the Fernard-Widal Hospital in Paris studied 22 people who had regularly consumed between 100 and 500 grammes of chocolate a day over several years.

The study revealed that such chocolate "freaks" are very active, both physically and mentally, and their alertness level is high. They show "intense professionalism", whatever their job. They do not experience anxiety.

The side effects of chocolate binges are negligible: there is no insomnia, no psychomotor agitation, and no weight gain. And the withdrawal symptoms observed in chocolate "freaks" when they are deprived of chocolate amount to nothing more than minor anxiety.

In view of chocolate's low toxic effects, it was admitted back in 1985 that chocolate addiction could not be likened to drug addiction. By stimulating physical and intellectual activity, supplying energy and generating a feeling of euphoria and well-being with virtually no side effects and a low level of addiction, chocolate qualifies as an almost ideal soft drug.

Henri Chaveron is professor at the department of biological and medical engineering at Compiègne University

(December 26)

Egypt backs ban on female circumcision

Alexandre Buccianti in Cairo

ON December 28, the Egyptian council of state banned female circumcision — or female genital mutilation (FGM) — "even with the consent of the girl and her parents". It said circumcision was a form of bodily mutilation, already punishable by a three-year jail sentence if carried out without medical justification, and concluded that a special law banning FGM did not therefore need to be introduced.

On June 24, Islamists led by Sheikh Yussef al-Badri got a Cairo court to quash a decree introduced by the health minister in 1996 banning FGM in all state hospitals. They claimed the practice was not only legal, but recommended by the Sunna (the body of customs attributed to Mohammed). However, the council of state has come down on the side of the health minister, who had appealed against the earlier ruling.

The council said Islamic jurisprudence did not make provision for FGM, "for there is nothing in the Koran that authorises it". The Sunna was not in any way in favour of FGM, which had nothing to do with religion anyway, since it was a custom that "took root well before the appearance of Judaism, Christianity and Islam".

Opponents of FGM contend that the Islamists base their arguments on the apocryphal Hadith (sayings of Mohammed). The only exception to the rule is "medical necessity", which requires confirmation by the head of a hospital's gynaecological department.

The council's ruling has been interpreted as a victory by those who want to ban FGM. Among them is the Egyptian Organisation of Human Rights, which took out proceedings against the former imam of the Al Azhar mosque, the highest authority in Sunni Islam, when he issued a fatwa authorising FGM in October 1994.

The ruling brings down the curtain on a lengthy legal and political controversy that began in 1959 with a government decree prohibiting non-medical personnel from carrying out FGM. The present imam of Al Azhar revived the debate by claiming that nothing in Islam prevented FGM from being banned if doctors believed the practice to be "harmful to health".

The council's ruling will, however, be hard to enforce. According to a government study, criticised as unreliable by opponents of FGM, the custom is practised by 97 per cent of Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians.

(December 30)



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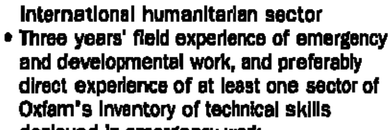
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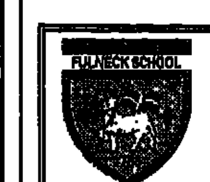


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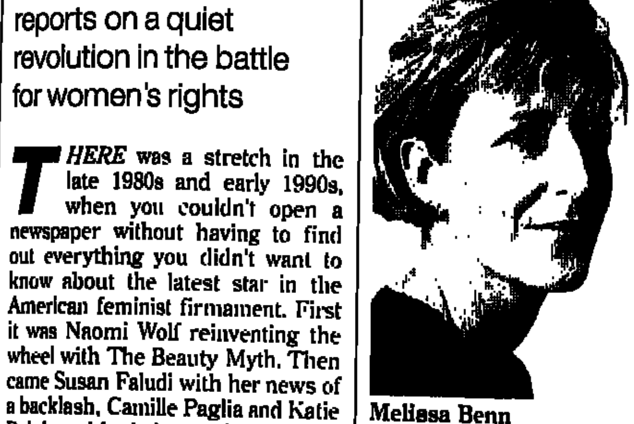
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British feminists make their mark

Maureen Freely reports on a quiet revolution in the battle for women's rights



Melissa Benn Jayne Buxton



Natasha Walter



Kate Figes

THERE was a stretch in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when you couldn't open a newspaper without having to find out everything you didn't want to know about the latest star in the American feminist firmament. First it was Naomi Wolf reinventing the wheel with The Beauty Myth. Then came Susan Faludi with her news of a backlash, Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe with their attacks on feminist puritanism, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin with their high-minded affirmation of same, then Naomi Wolf again . . .

Natasha Walter, who was working at the Independent newspaper at the time, remembers how troubled she was about the all-American outlook in "these books that kept flopping down on my desk. I read them and thought, where's the story about our country?"

Of course, as she knew only too well, British papers were full of stories about feminists. They were all man-haters with butch haircuts and hairy legs. Reports about the ideology they peddled were more confused. You could pick up a paper on Monday and find out that feminism was dead. On Tuesday, you could read that feminist infiltration of certain industries was so great that no man could hope ever to rise above the rank of secretary. On Wednesday, you could discover the future for men looked bright again, because the new women executives would never call themselves feminists. On Thursday, you could read that feminism was pushing men out of family life — only to find out on Friday that feminism had betrayed women because, really, they wanted their husbands to be breadwinners.

It was to dispel these myths that Walter decided to write her own book. "I felt there was something going on that wasn't being explained. There was a real desire for equality felt by women of all classes all over Britain." She insists she was never alone in her impatience with the popular view of feminism. So it shouldn't be surprising that The New Feminism (Little Brown) is not the only new book to rise up against these myths and seek to replace them with something closer to reality. In the preface to Madonna And Child: Towards A New Politics Of Motherhood (Jonathan Cape), Melissa Benn talks of wanting to discover a story about motherhood that hadn't yet been told. Kate Figes comes straight to the same point in her title: Life After Birth — What Even Your Friends Won't Tell You About Motherhood (Viking).

"I wrote it," she says, "because I couldn't find a book to explain what was happening to me as I became a mother." There was "an amazing silence" about the way your whole outlook changed. Everyone was so very keen to collude in this great white lie that women "could just drop babies and go right back to work".

That's just one of the popular myths Jayne Buxton attacks and demolishes in Ending The Mother War, Starting The Workplace Revolution (Macmillan), due out this spring. She talks of her frustration with the lies and flimsy statistics used by both sides of the debate on working mothers.

It was a similar impatience with the upbeat reports about the bright future awaiting today's young women that led Suzanne Franks to write Having None Of It: Women, Men And The Future Of Work (Granta), coming out next autumn. It tells a dark story: look at the real facts and figures, she says, and what you see is that young women are doing extraordinarily well in schools and at work in their 20s, but somewhere between 30 and 35, something terrible happens. Those with families often opt for that chimera, which poorer women call part-time work and the more privileged like to call a portfolio career. They soon find themselves with lots of time, but no money or security.

Meanwhile the ones who stay in work have lots of money, but no time. They are, Buxton found, not just stretched to the limit but also extraordinarily resigned. A famous example she cites is the former head of Pepsi. When she gave up the job to make more time for her family, Buxton recalls: "She said: 'I really do hope corporate America addresses this problem.' And I thought, God, if she doesn't, then who will?"

BUXTON'S research took her to many women who actually are addressing the problem — but because there is little communication between them, or news about them, they feel as if they are working in isolation. Walter came across the same problem when looking at women's rights and community programmes. Everywhere she went, she found them moving mountains, but few had any sense that they were part of a larger effort and they spent a lot of time apologising for themselves . . . as did most of the 100 mothers Kate Figes interviewed.

Many of them used her "as a therapist". They thought there was something wrong with them for not having bounced back "to normal on day two" and for feeling "the emotional pull" of their children. The stories they told her were stories they had not dared tell their friends or even their spouses. The most shocking thing was that they didn't realise how normal they were.

The everyday realities of domestic life were what shocked Melissa Benn most, too. This was particularly true for the poorer mothers she interviewed. It wasn't just the conditions under which they worked, it was the amazing things they had been able to achieve in spite of them. There was a whole world out there "not touched by the values of the market", but no public recognition that it even existed.

Why the conspiracy of silence? All the authors agree it's not just a media problem: also to blame are certain recent trends in feminism. For Walter, it is identity politics and obsession with the personal. She wants to see less policing of clothes, desire, boyfriends and family life, and more attention given to material problems such as the female poverty trap and the inadequate protection of victims of sexual violence, and the reorganisation of work and childcare so that men as well as women can spend more time with their families.

Franks, Buxton, Figes and Benn also criticise the way feminists have overvalued the workplace, while undervaluing feminine and maternal tradition. "We are old enough", Figes says, "to know the whole truth."

The old white lies may have been necessary correctives in the days when most people believed women had no business outside the home, but a more balanced view is needed now. Many more people today believe it is as wrong to require that "women work as if they don't have a life" as it is to make them "live as if they don't need to work". That is the false choice Buxton sees behind the present debate. The only way to dissolve it is to start from the "simple insight that the same people who are going to work are the same people who have families, so why not shape the world so we can do a decent job?"

All are keen that this debate be about fundamentals and involve men as well as women. At the same time, no one is pretending there is a huge male interest in the politics of the life/work balance at present. This is a source of some frustration. ("Why the hell aren't men our age arguing about this?" is how Benn expresses it.) It has also led Buxton to conclude that the necessary changes aren't ever going to happen unless the first collective pushing comes from women.

Not everyone shares her optimism that the job can be done; all admit the project they have set for themselves is enormous. The demands for social justice might sound reasonable, and the confirmation of family ties will be music to many ears, as will the new pluralist mood and the soft, friendly line on men and femininity. But a moment will arrive when people work out that these new feminists are far more radical than their predecessors, if for no other reason than that they are asking for real changes! now! in the way our society organises work and regulates family life. That means changing the way political priorities get made and economies planned, and overseeing an overhaul of just about every institution in Britain, from schools to pension funds.

"We are not just talking about tinkering around the edges," Buxton says. "Let's respect the problems we are facing by calling it a revolution."

It may be naive, though, to expect it could happen without people who don't want it to happen generating a whole new set of harmful and misleading stories to justify their determination to do absolutely nothing. The history of feminism is littered with inspired thinkers who got nowhere because, like these new writers, they had to waste most of their energy clearing up their opponents' diversionary lies. So what will it be this time? New feminism, new world, or new feminism, new myths?

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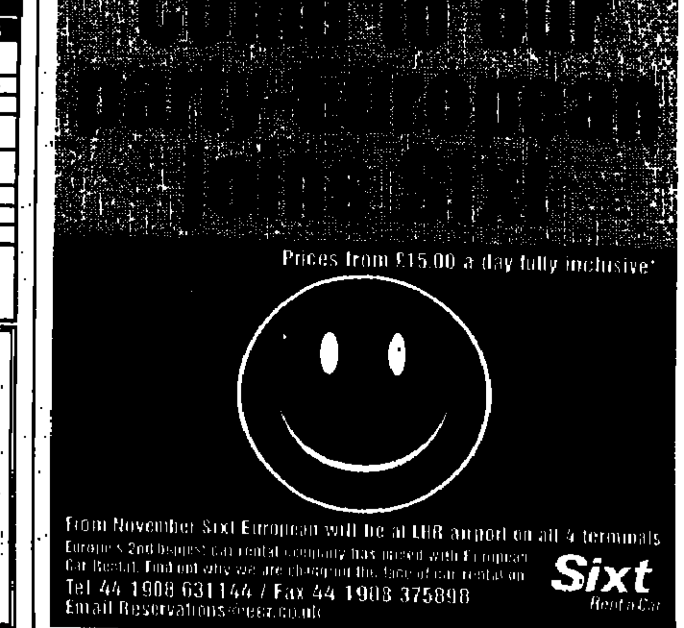
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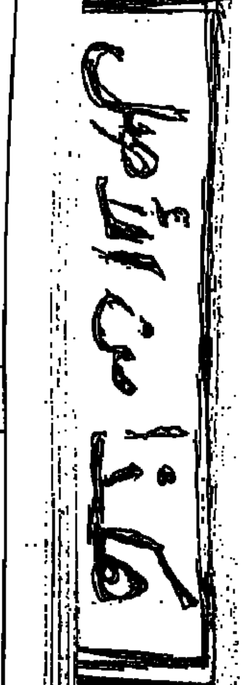
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Dana International represents Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest this year. Only problem is that she was once a he. The singer tells **David Sharrock** about the hostility she faces from ultra-Orthodox Jews

When it's hard to be a woman



Bar mitzvah boy Yaron Cohen

DANA is a Eurovision name of proven vintage. Yet Rosemary Scallon of Derry, the apple-cheeked Pro-Life activist and wannabe Irish president, would probably be tempted to chuck holy water over her Israeli namesake if they were ever to share a stage.

The new Dana has different preoccupations, chief among them staying solvent as a transsexual when a powerful religious lobby is trying to put her out of business. Dana International is simply trying to represent her country at this year's Eurovision Song Contest in Birmingham.

Of Yemenite origin, Dana was born 25 years ago into a working-class Sephardi Jewish family and given the name Yaron Cohen. From the age of eight, Yaron knew he wanted to be a singer, but it was not until his late teens that he realised he wanted to be a woman.

At 18 he was touring Israel as the country's first drag queen. When he cracked the one-camel town of Beersheva, reckoned to be home to the most macho of Israeli manhood, he knew that greatness beckoned.

"I was scared of everywhere outside Tel Aviv, but in Beersheva they thought I was a sex symbol!" Dana laughs. Today she is eschewing the trappings of glamour with her hair scraped up and just a hint of make-up.

She feels that Israel has come a long way in the four years since her sex change — an operation she had in London which was "just like buying clothes" — her platinum albums, her award-winning video in which she bumps and grinds on a banana and now this greatest of honours, to represent her country in the world's best-known, if kitschest, song contest.

But the problem, as Dana sees it, is that not all of Israel is travelling in the same direction. The problem becomes more serious when ultra-Orthodox Jewry mounts a campaign to have the decision of the country's Eurovision selectors overturned as well as exerting pressure on concert promoters to cancel her shows.

In Tiberias, for example, where Dana says the religious count for no more than 15 per cent of the population, the local council cancelled a holiday concert at the last minute following stormy scenes in the town hall.

"They believe I am the devil incarnate and are willing to kill me," she says bluntly of the ultra-Orthodox. None of her enemies has gone as far as threatening her publicly, but Shlomo Ben-Isri, a member of the Knesset, said that Israel was supposed to be "a light unto the nations of the world, but this is darkness".

Ben-Izri is a member of the Shas party, an ultra-Orthodox organisation that is rapidly turning itself into Israel's driving political force by tapping the resentment of the majority Sephardi (that is to say, of North African and Middle Eastern origin) community over their perceived downtrodden status compared with the Ashkenazi (European) élite.

In different circumstances Dana might be a Shas convert. Instead, she turns in such passionate denunciations of them and the wider ultra-Orthodox populace that she has become a darling of the secular Jews. "Before the present government, the religious had no political power. But now, because of Bibi [prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu], the Orthodox have real power for the first time. We have become two nations and, it's true, for many people I have come to represent freedom, democracy and the right to live how individuals want to live."

It seems a bold claim, but to see is to believe, and Dana has won converts even within the Orthodox community, a crossing of the Rubicon which for them means exile.

What is it about Dana that she can affect people so profoundly? For one, it is the humour with which she faces a hostile world. Take the story of how she evaded military service, which is compulsory for all citizens — except for Dana's friends in the religious community, who go and study the Torah in yeshivas instead. "I said to them, 'OK, I'll do my military service, but as a woman'. They said, 'No you won't, you will do it like every other man' and called me in for my medical. I said 'Fine' and just pulled up my shirt to show them my breasts. Then they looked at one another and said to me 'bye bye' and that was it."

The Eurovision Song Contest may give Dana a wider audience but she is already a cult star in neighbouring Egypt, where pirate copies of her albums sell at a premium. She was to have sung in Cairo recently, but the Egyptian government banned her from entering the country. "They claimed I was a Zionist plot to corrupt the youth of Egypt," she laughs.

On the strength of her novelty value alone, Dana is likely to hit very few "nul points" in the Eurovision, but is she just a gimmick? Gil Samsonov, who heads the board that selected Dana International, said the gimmick consideration did arise, but it was secondary. "Dana's song stood out from the start, and was chosen by a great majority. It won't hurt us on our 50th anniversary to stand out favourably as a modern liberal nation."

AND this is where some liberals part company with the notion of Dana representing Israel. "It's a perfect illustration of the hypocrisy infecting this state," says one. "Imagine, if Israel was truly this modern enlightened nation, then why not have someone from the Arab community representing us? You will never see it."

That argument cuts no ice with Dana, who is ever more confident about speaking her mind in public. "At the last election I stayed quiet, but at the next people will listen to what I have to say because they have now had a taste of government under the religious. If the [ultra-Orthodox] Haredim want to live according to laws from 2,000 years ago, they shouldn't try to run the country.

"The Haredim can try to stop me because they have so much power in the government you cannot imagine. These are the people who want to make homosexuality an offence punishable by death. And because I am what I am it just doubles for them.

"So let the world see in Birmingham next year that Israel can send a song with rhythm and new opinions of life, and you should know these things about Israelis too, not just wars and the problems."



Dark star . . . on the strength of her novelty value alone, Dana is unlikely to receive many *nul points* in Birmingham
PHOTOGRAPHS: REX

A crusader in Sicily

OBITUARY
Danilo Dolci

DANILO DOLCI, who has died aged 73, came to be known as the "Gandhi of Italy". His particular mission was to undermine the causes of Sicily's poverty and backwardness. In doing so, he found himself taking on not only the Mafia but also those in Italy's civil and religious hierarchies who underpinned its sinister power.

Dolci secured a string of practical improvements in the lives of the disempowered whose cause he embraced. He brought their plight to the notice of the world. But perhaps his greatest achievement was to raise the consciousness and reinforce the confidence of many of Sicily's most wretched inhabitants.

Less than 20 years ago, people would have been flabbergasted at the modest way in which his death was reported: brief reports by the main international news agencies, one of which consigned him to history as a "sociologist popular in northern Europe". Yet he was always better known and more admired outside Italy.

In the idealistic 1970s Dolci had the status of a global celebrity. Thousands of students from northern Europe descended on the centre he founded near Palermo to study the causes of the desperate living standards of western Sicily's peasant farmers.

His books were given extensive reviews in the foreign press. His visits abroad to raise funds were treated as significant news events. There were Dolci committees in many parts of Britain and elsewhere in the more prosperous nations of Europe. In 1982, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

But back in Sicily, he never quite shook himself free of the effects of a whispering campaign that said he was a self-publicist, a charlatan and a busybody. That campaign, needless to say, sprang from the resentment of those whose interests he compromised. But in parochial Sicily it thrived on the fact that he was an uninvited outsider.

Dolci came from Trieste, up on the border with the then Yugoslavia. His first career was as an architect. He went to live in Sicily in 1952 and, after putting up a couple of buildings near Trappeto, outside Palermo, threw himself into the task of looking after orphaned children. His settlement was called the Village of God, and there was always a religious inspiration behind what he did. In Norman Lewis's book about the Mafia, The Honoured Society, he was quoted as saying of the Sicilians: "There is God in these people, like the fire beneath the ashes."

But his faith was one which — as soon as it moved him to denounce the Cosa Nostra — brought him into conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. As far as the then Archbishop of Palermo was concerned, the Mafia did not exist. But then the Mafia guaranteed a stable — if grotesquely unjust — social order; it had ways of dealing with awkward trade union leaders and could guarantee votes for the Christian Democrat party, which the Vatican saw — correctly — as an effective defence against communism.

Within his first year in Sicily, Dolci had defied the threat of Mafia reprisals to lead a pioneering protest — a hunger strike in protest at the death of a child from starvation. It was not long before his protests brought him into collision with the authorities.

Dolci soon grasped that a key reason for the prostration of those who worked the land of western Sicily was water — or rather, the control of it, which was exercised by the Mafia. He organised a string of fasts, marches and strikes to bring dams and reservoirs into barren valleys, where the Cosa Nostra, with the connivance of local estate owners, was charging exorbitant prices for access to irrigation.

Fasting was the key instrument in Dolci's armoury of non-violent weapons. A correspondent who visited him while he was on his eighth hunger strike in 1963 described the scene: "Dolci is now lying on a little bed in a dingy, fly-invaded single room that was once a café. The door opens on to the small piazza and at times there are more people in the room than in the square. All day long, crowds of men, women and children wander in to see Dolci.

"They gaze at him, shoot questions at him, laugh with him. Sometimes, groups of children sing or recite poems to him. Dolci, a big man with anything but the look of a crusader about him, loves this and his eyes sparkle."



Danilo Dolci . . . used fasting to help Sicily's peasants break the Mafia's grip PHOTOGRAPH: JANE BO[illegible]

He is survived by five children from his first marriage and two from his second.

Joe Farrell adds: Danilo Dolci enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s fame on a worldwide scale, saw it slip away from him and appeared as unconcerned by its passing as he had been indifferent to its presence.

During both the years of celebrity and of obscurity, Dolci remained at work, writing and organising. He will be remembered as a social reformer rather than as a writer. His writing was action by other means and the books of interviews and sociological research from the 1950s, such as Bandits In Partinico, or Enquiry In Palermo, were enormously influential in shaking public apathy over conditions in Sicily.

Dolci declared he would lead a crusade against both want and violence, and had the charisma to make people both believe and follow him. Like all single-minded men, Dolci made enemies carelessly.

In part his own success made him redundant and ignored. His interest switched from an attempt to change people by changing society to an attempt to change individuals so as to change society.

John Hooper

Danilo Dolci, writer and social worker, born June 28, 1924; died December 30, 1997

Letter from Canada Ole Gjerstad

Frozen out

THE old man Quinangnaq climbs to the top of the rocky ridge. From there his binoculars cover a 10km radius of frozen Canadian tundra. He points towards the low orange sun. "There's a group over there," he says. "Twenty caribou. Too far."

Fifty years ago Quinangnaq needed more than 150 caribou a year to feed his family and dog team and have enough for clothing, rope and tents. No longer. The old hunter pulls up the hood of his Gortex parka and we turn our snowmobiles back in the direction of Baker Lake.

This winter is an anniversary of sorts for Quinangnaq and the dwindling number of Inuit elders in the region. Forty years ago, when this place was known to whites as the Barren Grounds, the scattered groups of Caribou Inuit almost came to an end. Weakened by years of epidemics and declining fur prices, they had gathered near mission stations and trading posts or been arbitrarily moved by the government. When the migrating caribou herds failed to appear in the autumn, Quinangnaq's family and others faced the brutal winter without reserves of any kind.

In February 1958, with the thermometer lodged below -40C for weeks, people began to starve to death. Some family groups had lost half of their number by the time the Royal Canadian Mounted Police aircraft located the camps and brought the survivors to Baker Lake and the tiny settlements on the Hudson Bay coast.

Thus ended the last nomadic society in North America.

Over tea and bannock in the prefabricated two-storey house, Quinangnaq and his wife Tululik are of two minds concerning their rescue.

"Our lives were saved, but we became prisoners," says the old man. "We tried to return to hunting grounds, but the police plane found us. They made us camp near the town, but my spirits were not here. There were no caribou, no fish."

"It was blackmail," says Tululik. "The authorities took our children away to go to school. They threatened to cut off our family allowance. My youngest was crying all the time and so was I."

Six years after the famine, Tululik and Quinangnaq accepted a government house in Baker Lake. The lords of the land became wards of the state.

From near-extinction 40 years ago, the Inuit population today is booming. The Baker Lake school needs a new extension every few years. Large and loosely-knit families crowd into government-supplied houses.

Quinangnaq and Tululik have had seven children and, so far, 10 grandchildren. The life of their affectionate extended family is centred in the living room, where hunks of caribou meat thaw on a slab of cardboard next to a television set that shows a newscast from Toledo, Ohio. Detailed maps of the tundra cover one wall. Tululik spends hours on a bed by the window stitching scenes from traditional camp life. Each one may fetch as much as $2,000 in galleries around the world.

Old Quinangnaq sits by the Citizen's Band radio set where hunters and travellers discuss weather and hunting conditions across the tundra.

The large caribou herds have returned and pass through Baker Lake twice a year. The old couple eat very little of the ultra-expensive Western foods stocked in the supermarket.

In 1999, as Quinangnaq turns 80, the eastern part of the Canadian Arctic will become an Inuit homeland with substantial autonomy. The event is a source of both pride and anxiety to people in Baker Lake — anxiety because the Canadian government would like to reduce its spending, yet there is little alternative revenue in sight. In Baker Lake, a possible uranium mine is the only hope of employment outside government service. And the prospect divides the community.

Quinangnaq thinks less of money than about the disappearance of his old way of life. In a few years nobody in Baker Lake will know how to build a kayak. People speak more English and less Inuktitut. They pour soy sauce on their *muktuk*.

"My grandchildren have a good life," says the old hunter. "I'm happy for them. But they will never understand what it was like to be an Inuk like me."

Neanderthal clues found in Rock cave

Tim Radford

SCIENTISTS are hard on the tracks of Neanderthal man. And not just the tracks: in a cave in Gibraltar at the end of a season's dig, archaeologists have found evidence of a fireside supper of mussels, pistachio and tortoise prepared more than 30,000 years ago.

They think they may also have found the all-too-natural aftermath: coprolites, or fossilised excrement.

Professor Chris Stringer, of London's Natural History Museum, says: "When we found them we sealed them in foil and plastic bags to avoid contamination: some have fragments of bone in them. We can't be sure yet that they are human: they might be from a carnivore. We have got to subject them to very careful examination."

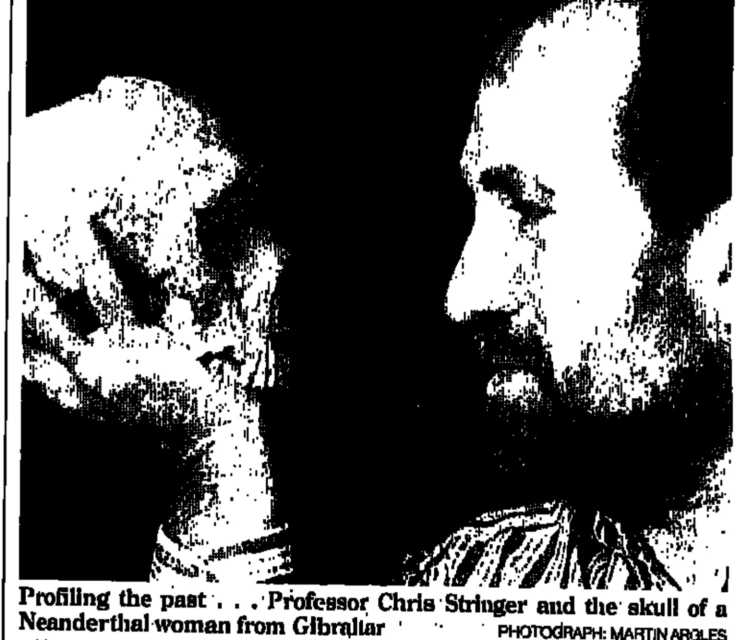
When examined, the coprolites will answer questions about the diet that went into them and the creature that left them behind. The little objects may also contain DNA, which could then be compared with genetic evidence recovered earlier last year from another Neanderthal skeleton.

The Gibraltar site is important for two reasons. One is that although *Homo Neanderthalensis* is named after a skeleton unearthed in the Neander Valley in Germany in 1856, the first Neanderthal bones discovered were those of a woman, found in a quarry in Gibraltar in 1848.

Second, the Gibraltar government will this year host an international conference to celebrate 150 years of the discovery of yesterday's European. The two Gibraltar skulls, both at the Natural History Museum, will return for the conference.

The Neanderthals occupied Europe for more than 60,000 years. They were bulky, muscular and adapted to cold: they had huge noses and receding foreheads, but there is no evidence that they had less brainpower than modern humans, who moved out of Africa and into Europe only about 40,000 years ago.

Only two skulls have been found in Gibraltar. One of them is composed merely of fragments found in 1926. Two years ago, using modern scanning equipment and computer design, German scientists reconstructed the original head. It belonged to a child of four, but the cranium has space for a brain as large as any from a modern adult.



Profiling the past . . . Professor Chris Stringer and the skull of a Neanderthal woman from Gibraltar PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN ARGLES

A Country Diary

Richard Mabey

CHILTERNS: Have we come to take inland seagulls too much for granted? Black-headed gulls, especially, are one of the most ubiquitous and visible birds of winter, whether they are seething behind a plough in deep countryside or threading arcs around the top of an office block — and they press so widely on human activities that they can fade into the background like pigeons. Yet they are the most perfectly aerial creatures to be seen in towns.

Stranded in a traffic jam in Maidenhead one late December afternoon, I carefully watched a group for the first time in years. They were wafting in spirals just feet above the cars, lowering themselves with effortless slow wing-flexings towards some bread on the pavement. It was the same route that a sheet of wind-blown newspaper might take, and I suddenly saw them as images of pure buoyancy, sketching out the currents and layers in the air, and turning the mundane atmosphere of the suburbs into something as lively as coastal ozone.

I have been marvelling ever since at how lyrical and evocative their flight is. They dip and squall over nearby roofs, and hawk up and down the canal like harriers. In the late afternoon, I see long, straggling lines of them flying to roost at Tring Reservoirs, a reminder that winter is a time of comings and goings, and an echo of the great daily movements of goose and waders out on the coast.

W H Hudson wrote a wonderful description of the roosting gulls in London's St James's Park 100 years ago, when they were still something of a novelty inland: "Seeing them thus, sitting high as their manner is, tossed up and down with the tumbling water, yet every bird keeping his place in the company . . . [made] a picture of black winter and beautiful bird life, which would have had a rare attraction even in the desert places of the Earth . . ."

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

MOTHER GOOSE is celebrated in pantomime, and is recorded as having been buried at St Olave's Church, London, in 1586. But who was she?

THERE is a legend that this character was based on an actual woman from Boston, USA, named Elizabeth Goose (sometimes "Vergoose" or "Vertigoose") who is supposed to have written a book of children's rhymes in 1719.

The character Mother Goose was first associated with nursery rhymes in a book published by John Newberry & Co in 1781 entitled Mother Goose's Melody Or Sonnets From The Cradle. Newbury appears to have derived the name Mother Goose from a collection of fairy tales published in 1697 by the French author Charles Perrault entitled Contes de Ma Mère l'Oye. This translates as "Tales of my Mother Goose", a French folk expression roughly equivalent to the English "old wives' tales". — *Nick Spokes, Ilford, Essex*

IS THERE any truth in the story that a British officer in the first world war would not allow his troops to wear helmets because he thought they were "sissy"?

IN The First Day On The Somme, Martin Middlebrook writes that the steel helmet was first issued in the spring of 1916. Before that soldiers wore soft caps and sustained numerous head wounds. The new helmets reduced such wounds by 75 per cent, but "one divisional commander, who also forbade the issue of rum, refused at first to permit the use of steel helmets. He considered that it would encourage the men to go soft". Such was the calibre of leadership which left nearly 20,000 British men dead on the first day of that battle. — *Paul Flint, Madrid, Spain*

IF dinosaurs had developed complex civilisations, could any evidence of this possibly have survived 65 million years?

IT'S NOT impossible that several so-called "anomalous" fossils bear witness to incredibly ancient civilisations. At least two "artefacts" have been discovered in coal: an iron "instrument" resembling a drill bit was found completely sealed in a coal seam in 1852; and a piece of gold "thread" was found in a rock 2.5m below ground level in Rutherford, Scotland, in 1844.

Two apparent pre-prehistoric nails have also been found: a 5cm nail in gold-bearing quartz (reported in the Times, 1851); and a 18cm nail in a block of granite in 1845.

In 1968, in Antelope Spring, Utah, a two-inch thick slab of rock was split to reveal a "human footprint", wearing a shoe, in rock 300 million years old. This find pre-dates the evolution of the dinosaurs. — *Garrick Alder, Kempston, Bedfordshire*

IN THE classic 1940s Tom & Jerry cartoons there are several occasions in which Tom turns to camera and bellows in a mournful voice "Don't you believe it!" What is its origin?

I CAN remember, as a child in Canada in the early 1940s, hearing periodically on American radio a feature which started by citing some commonly-held misperception. A deep, sepulchral sounding voice would then loudly proclaim: "Don't you believe it"; and you would be told the correct version. We would repeat the statement for fun on the playground, and knew exactly where Tom & Jerry got it from. — *Michael Landon, Oxford, Mississippi, USA*

Any answers?

THEY say something will cost the Earth. If I were a wealthy alien, how much could I expect to be invoiced if I were to purchase it? — *Paul Sampson, Newcastle upon Tyne*

WHAT is acomia/acomous, which I find in Roget's Thesaurus but nowhere else? — *Eric Knott, Sale, Cheshire*

THE ancestors of dolphins and whales crawled out of the sea, evolved into mammals and then crawled back into the sea. Why did they bother? — *William Barrett, London*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Troubled waters

It sounds like the stuff of dreams: a Paul Simon musical with Derek Walcott lyrics and Mark Morris dance routines. So why is it a nightmare, asks **Martin Kettle**

WHEN a songwriter is as famous and as good as Paul Simon then, from one way of looking at it, he has nothing left to prove for the rest of his life. But when, like Simon, you cut your first record at 16, are a superstar at 26, and have been sustained on acclaim ever since, then it is not surprising that, when you reach 56, the lure of doing something new is difficult to resist. And when that something is a Broadway musical about Puerto Ricans of the West Side Story era, then it is hardly surprising the world takes notice.

All of which is enough to ensure that next month's première of Simon's The Capeman — directed by dance legend Mark Morris and with lyrics co-written by Nobel laureate Derek Walcott — is one of the music business's most long-awaited events. There is, however, another reason for the long wait: the postponements.

The Capeman was to have opened officially on January 8, at the Marquis Theatre in New York. But in mid-December, the show's producer, Dan Klores, announced a three-week delay for unspecified reorganisation. Assuming that The Capeman finally opens on January 29, the show will have been running in "preview" for nearly two months.

In the envy-filled world of New York hype, there were those who believed that the postponement was nothing more than a wheeze to boost interest still further in a show which has taken $5 million in advance ticket sales.

Having seen one of the previews, however, it is clear that there are real problems with the show and that the most ambitious venture in Simon's career is hanging in the balance, as he works 18 hours a day (they say) in order to make the show audience-worthy.

The Capeman is a musical about a murderer. It tells the story of the life of Salvador Agron, who, as a 16-year-old Puerto Rican immigrant, stabbed two teenagers to death in a gang fight in New York City's Hell's Kitchen district in 1959. Agron became a summer sensation in the New York media. He was paraded as the embodiment of heartless evil — and acted up to the role. The press nicknamed him "The Capeman" because of a long black cape he wore on the night of the crime.

There was never any dispute about Agron's guilt. He was sentenced to die in the electric chair, but his age caused protesters to persuade New York's governor, Nelson Rockefeller, to commute the sentence. Agron served 20 years in prison, where he became a poet.

In the notes that accompany his recent album of songs from The Capeman, Simon says, "Like many New Yorkers, I remember the Capeman story from my youth. It was the summer between high school and college, and the story was all over the papers and on TV. I remember thinking, here was a kid my age — a kid who had the look. Salvador Agron looked like a rock 'n' roll hoodlum. He looked like the 1950s."

In those words there is a whiff of the attitude that provoked a demonstration against the show in December. For Sal Agron is the tragic hero of Simon's musical. He is a cool, impressionable and intelligent teenager who is suddenly caught up in an act of which he is almost as much the victim as the two Irish boys he kills. Not surprisingly, since this is America, a group called Parents of Murdered Children took offence and began a picket. "Murder is not entertainment," said the protesters, though without mounting a similar campaign against Don Giovanni.

A more serious threat came with the postponement announcement on December 18. Officially, the opening night was put back in order to provide time for more rehearsal. "We have some terrific ideas to try and implement," said Klores, "and one of them is a big song in the second act, and we have some creative moves to make which will make the show even better."



Paul Simon on the set of The Capeman PHOTO: SARA KRULWICH

It is hard to take seriously the theory that this is all a promotional bluff. A first-night delay is an embarrassment as well as being bad for morale. It came, moreover, amid persistent rumours that all was not going well. Mark Morris, for all his recent successes (which include Platée for the Royal Opera), has never directed a Broadway musical and was brought into The Capeman by Simon at a late stage. Though Klores denied it, Morris's authority was undermined by the back-stage appearance of star directors Mike Nichols and Nicholas Hytner early in December.

"We're a good show, but we can be better," Klores said. The second part of his comment is certainly true. For instance, it is surprising that The Capeman's heavily Latin-influenced musical score and Morris's background as a choreographer have produced so few big dance numbers.

Simon's Songs From The Capeman album, which contains his own versions of 13 of the numbers (Simon does not himself appear in the show) proves that he is brilliant at absorbing and regenerating different musical styles, notably in its do-wop pastiches and, even more importantly, in the salsa-infused numbers that dominate the score. And the long collaboration with the poet Derek Walcott ensures that Simon preserves his ability to drop a meaningless but beguilingly sung line of lyric deep into the consciousness.

Yet his songs cannot disguise the fact that the show lacks both shape and climax. Even in the dramatically superior first half, Simon's inability to write theatrically-focused music gives it a very distanced feel. The second half meanders terribly and needs cutting, and the show suffers from the lack of a theatrical ending.

In making last-minute changes to his work, Simon is in a distinguished company which extends back to Mozart. But, as even Schubert and Brahms found, the translation from great songwriter to great composer for the theatre is not easy.

My night with Reg Dwight

POP
Pat Kane

***SCHOOM!* You are now in a parallel universe. And in this universe, Elton John is king of hip. You watch the events on stage at the Glasgow SECC and everything becomes overwhelmingly wonderful.**

Leather-legged fortysomething Californians in cowboy boots widdle out ridiculous solos on guitars with two necks. *Stunning*. Elton plays a solo while lying under the Yamaha, his hands reaching over the keys like Thing from the Addams Family. *Sublime*. Endless pub-rock boogie-woogie piano workouts, illuminated only by the lighting engineer. *It's the new paradigm, you sonic kids.*

***For a thirtysomething reviewer, this is like corrective surgery: you were imbibing Elton John songs before you had the power to resist. So every time he sails through the soundscape, those neurons fire, a trigger for simpler times, simpler selves.* What other musician would have been common-denominator enough to unite the Diana-fevered in song? To his lasting credit, Elton didn't do The Number at this gig. But think back to the funeral day, and you get a handle on why watching Reginald Dwight can be such a maddening mixture of populist joy and rockular embarrassment.**

For one thing, the voice both in Westminster Abbey and here is lower and growlier than in his shrieking glam days. What just about saved it for his Candle In The Wind funeral performance was his restraint — no false soulsterisms, just a balladeer, tiptoeing his way through awful lyrics, paying an almost Sinatra-like respect to a cheap but potent song. And in Glasgow, Elton knelt down before most of his slow songs in exactly this way — negotiating his more limited range and giving as good a white-soul performance as the very term allows.



Elton storms Glasgow

You get a glimpse of Elton John — while quietly (and affectingly) working his way through such ballads as Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me — as a Cole Porter for the later ages of Middle Britain; for those who need songs to help them slowly dim the light. Even if his ballad-powers are waning, no one could deny how well his tunes have articulated the suburban metaphysic.

Look around you in the hall. To hate this audience — for their bad perms, for their quiet murmuring of easy couplets — is to hate a large section of humanity. Do so, if you wish. But you'd be a concrete slab not to be touched by the timeless spectacle of one singer, one song, one audience, fusing comfortably together.

Problem being that the same masses get even more excited when the Bad Elton — the arse-waving, key-bashing Elton — lets loose. Someone should take Reg aside, and tell him in no uncertain terms: please don't rock out any more. It's not just that Elton seems to think that hammering lumps out of the instrument with his feet is a sign of R 'n' B passion. What's worst is simply how old, and tired, and forced it makes him look.

Yet it was good he ended with a ballad, and somehow honest-sounding when he dedicated Your Song to "all those of you who have supported me over the last few months". Can we allow stinking rich celebs to share sorrow over the death of other stinking rich celebs? Yeah, why not. There'll be a universe where every one of them will be still alive, after all.

Turkey sandwich

CHRISTMAS TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

THE punishment for bigamy is not, as is commonly supposed, two mothers-in-law but two turkeys. In **Coronation Street** (ITV) John, who is giving tie salesmen a sadly flighty image, has toyed with Deirdre's finer feelings for months, though he has a wife, children and a turkey in the oven elsewhere.

Not only did the wretched man have to force down two helpings of everything on Christmas day, but his ear was comprehensively chewed by both women as he ricocheted between them. As we are all asking ourselves today, was it *worth* it?

Once upon a time, if you wanted Christmas snow on TV, you used Lux flakes. Now we have Christmas soaps.

In **EastEnders** (BBC1) Grant, not heeding or perhaps understanding his brother's grunts, ("Tell 'er i' is but don' go overboard") kicked down the bedroom door and gave Tiffany a little black eye to match her little back dress.

Meanwhile Aunt Sal was phoning her straying husband 'Arold: "Cockroaches 'ave more going for them than wot you 'ave." and Pat was stoutly repelling bailiffs: "Shut up or I'll punch your lights out!"

Brookside (Channel 4) had a Crimbo special about people whose names end in the sound -ee. Barry used our Lindsey to blackmail Jimmy into a Crimbo crime, but he was saved by the sight of a picture of Jackie and little Billy. Powerful, if local, dialogue: "You must be off your cake!"

It is feared that Jacqui Dixon's attempts at artificial insemination with a turkey-baster have seriously affected poultry sales.

Talking turkey, no bird seemed safe on TV this year. Les ran over his bird, producing instant turkey sandwich, Tony sat on his mother's Christmas budgie and, in Two Fat **Ladies** (BBC2) Clarissa casually produced a seasonal anecdote to chill the blood. Her father ("who fought this single-handed battle against us enjoying Christmas") kept the family budgie in formaldehyde for three months so he could bury it on Christmas day.

Scarred, one fears, by this childhood trauma, she produced a Christmas dinner for choirboys of such alcoholic and laxative content ("Here are the port and prunes!") that one feared for their Silent Night.

There are no big Christmas spectaculars on TV any more. There was even a programme, **Cardigans at Christmas** (BBC2), explaining why not. Your nostalgia for the big blockbusters in which, as Jenny Eclair said, everybody seemed to be having a much better time than you evaporated fast when you saw them again.

Black and White Minstrels throwing cotton-wool snowballs, ice-skating monkeys and Demis Roussos festooned with fairy lights? Only Morecambe and Wise survived the exposure.

As the perceptive Eclair said: "We have become a nation of sneerers; I'm a bit of a sneerer myself. It really is far too uncool to be seen to have a good time." And, of course, it costs.

Pieter the Elder's The Battle Between Carnival And Lent (1559)

The devil's in the detail

It's a Bruegel, but which one? **Adrian Searle** on the family that spawned an industry of copyists

THE BRUEGELS are confusing. There's Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Pieter Breughel the Younger (the elder son) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (the younger son). If the names and their spellings are confusing, the attribution of paintings to the father and his sons can also be tricky. There are copies, copies of copies, different versions by the father and by his workshop. Add to this transcriptions, details worked up into completed paintings, 17th century appropriations and rip-offs by other slavish hands. And let's not forget the modern prints, reproductions, old master acrylics and tasteful table-mats.

Sometimes, looking at a painting by Pieter the Elder, we might think the picture in question is by Hieronymus Bosch, also known as Jeronimus Van Aken. But then it might also be a Pieter Brueghel the Younger — "Hell Brueghel", as he was sometimes called, to distinguish him from his elder brother Jan, also known as "Velvet Brueghel". Then again, whether or not to drop the h in the surnames of the younger sons is still a moot point (the father dropped it early on. Perhaps even he was confused about it).

I stood at one of the festive street-stalls selling mulled wine in Vienna last month, cowering in the lee of the stall to get some respite from the freezing wind, I pondered the cat's cradle of names and attributions. It was nine degrees below zero, and I was either drunk or suffering the early stages of hypothermia, or possibly both.

I'd just come from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, which contains about a third of Pieter the Elder's paintings — the best collection of his paintings in the world — and which has mounted an exhibition that brings the entire family of painters together so we can sort out our Bruegels from our Breughels. The schnapps seemed to help, but it was an illusion.

Eleven thousand visitors besieged the museum in the show's first three days, desperate to sort out the Bruegel conundrum (and to find somewhere warm). The museum is worth a visit for its permanent collection alone. With the entire Bruegel dynasty on show, it is a unique opportunity to study the best — and worst — of the dynastic family business.

Sixteenth-century Antwerp, where the Bruegels worked, has been described as a factory of paintings. The Bruegel industry was hard at it more than 400 years ago, such was the demand for Pieter the Elder's paintings. We might sniff at the modern repros and the Bruegel tat, but the age of mechanical reproduction has merely multiplied what was already big business.

Let's get one thing straight. Pieter Bruegel the Elder was a marvellous artist. There is a wealth of details in his paintings. His Battle Between Carnival And Lent (1559) contains more than 230 figures: nuns, beggars, topers, idiots, dancers and revellers, the miserable, the mad, the real and the ridiculous. The painting is as often allied with compassion as with the farcical, the tragicomic, the artist's morbid eye. The strength of observation in Bruegel's painting is allied with an equally precise evocation of atmosphere and weather, wintry lowlands and vertiginous alpine grandeur, autumn storms and the weather in the soul.

Whether he was painting icicles and snot in a peasant's nostril, the horrible suicide of Saul or a child spinning a top on the ice, Pieter Bruegel the Elder did it with conviction. He was magnificently generous, and magnanimous even in his slyest, craziest inventions. His paintings have a wonderful tolerance of human folly but, at the same time, they can be utterly terrifying. His horrors did not evince the belief in witches and devils that spawned Bosch's paintings. For in the mid-16th century, Antwerp was, like the artist himself, worldly, mercantile and practical. The age of imaginary monsters was on the wane and the real horrors of the Inquisition in the rest of Europe, along with wars, plagues and famines, showed a different kind of hell — and Bruegel knew what it looked like.

If Pieter Bruegel was a precursor of anyone, let alone his sons and other Netherlandish followers, it is of the Goya of the Caprichos and the Black Paintings. Like Francisco Goya, Pieter Bruegel the Elder was a kind of realist of the madness of the world.

The large, first version of his Tower Of Babel, with its consummate invention of a fictive, phantasmagorical architecture, could almost be a model for a real tower. The Tower rises from a tilted plane. It seems, in fact, that the whole world is horribly skewed. When Pieter the Younger copied the painting he levelled it out.

That was the trouble with Pieter the Younger: he tidied up his father's works when he copied them, making them more mundane and less convincing, providing spurious, niggling detail to what was already consummate and complete. Pieter the Elder painted his paintings; Pieter the Younger illustrated them in paint, which is a different thing.

PIETER the Younger was, by all accounts, a bit of a disaster, financially as well as artistically, although some of his paintings give us glimpses of alternate versions and lost works by his father.

Jan the Elder (the younger son) was less slavish and niggling than his brother, and had artistic influences apart from his father (who had died when Jan was one year old). Jan became a friend of Rubens, and his work reflects a kind of Rubensian steely light and muscularity. He was also a consummate flower-painter. It was a lesser art than his father's, but magnificent none the less. Something of Pieter the Elder's copiousness and intensity enters Jan's flower paintings.

Yet it is always to Pieter Bruegel the Elder that we return. As studies of human nature, rather than fancy-dress peasants and ludicrous bucolics, they show us something of ourselves. The past, in Pieter the Elder's paintings, has real presence. The children are still on the ice. The hunters still trudge home through the snow. The magpie still flies.

Bruegel: A Family Of Painters From Antwerp, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, till April 14

Sex and sensibility

CINEMA
Richard Williams

IT HAS all the virtues of a classic British costume drama. A dead-on sense of period. Locations that send you out into the London streets with freshly peeled eyes. Clothes so exquisite they make you want to go shopping. What a surprise, then, that we emerge from **The Wings of the Dove** thinking mostly about sex.

Sex and Henry James? Hardly the most natural of partners. For James, fictive sex was in the head, and unexpressed. Yet the latest attempt to transfer his prose to the cinema screen reaches its conclusion with the year's, perhaps the decade's, most powerful piece of grown-up sex on celluloid, an act so emotionally shocking — raw, tearful, unresolved — and so central to the story that, like a black hole in the cosmos, it seems to pull every bit of the film's matter into itself.

To record that the sex in question involves Helena Bonham Carter may make it sound even less likely. But among the many qualities of Iain Softley's film is its transformation of Bonham Carter from a tiresome little snit in period costume to a romantic figure of complexity and conviction. And still in period costume.

As Kate Croy, the daughter of a ruined family who attempts to marry her lover off to a dying American heiress, Bonham Carter dominates the film, moving between watchfulness and abandon with a skill that commands our sympathy, even against the grain of her actions. Although it would hardly have been possible without the work of Softley and his screenwriter, Hossein Amini, her performance depends for its power on her own intellectual grasp of moral ambiguity, and an ability to translate it into something that the camera can see.

Amini and Softley — the director of Backbeat, the well-regarded Beatle-history film, and of the poorly received Hackers — take many liberties with James's story. The decision to move its period from 1902 to 1910 allows them, through the use of less constricting women's clothes, to hint at more modern patterns of thought and behaviour.

Kate, in particular, is a figure alienated from her surroundings. Her mother is dead; her father (Michael Gambon) is a derelict. She is taken up by her Aunt Maude (Charlotte Rampling) on the understanding that she will never again see her father or her lover, Merton Densher (Linus Roache), a handsome journalist of shallow ideals and shallower fortune. Launched into London society, she is steered towards an eligible landowner, Lord Mark (Alex Jennings).

But this is a surprisingly dark film, and one of its subjects is the humiliation of the British aristocracy. That, and an investigation of the human heart. Both themes are quickened by the arrival of Millie Theale (Alison Elliott) — beautiful, virtuous, wealthy and doomed. "She's the world's richest orphan," Lord Mark tells Kate, glimpsing the possibility of his own salvation. But when Millie falls for Densher, Kate senses a different outcome.

The film's Kate is less ruthless than the novel's, not so driven by cold materialism. Her father's failure lies behind her refusal to marry Densher in poverty: we see how she might have come to believe that fate can be purely a matter of willpower. Since her friendship with Millie is genuine, she is able to persuade us — and her lover, who is given a perfect veneer of lightweight sincerity by Roache — that her scheme is aimed at serving the general good

Virtually all the dialogue is freshly created, and Bonham Carter's demotic asperity contrasts well with Roache's amiable passivity and Elliott's serene goodness. Destiny acts on all three in a second half set largely in Venice, where the atmosphere of indulgence and decay nourishes the narrative.

The makers have removed some of James's characters (such as Kate's widowed sister) along with his daisy-chains of subordinate clauses, but the remaining minor parts are well served. Rampling's hauteur is at maximum wattage as she places a necklace at her niece's throat: "Try to look as if you've worn it all your life." And as Susie Stringham, the heiress's companion, Elizabeth McGovern reminds us that she would once have made an equally distinguished Millie.

Eduardo Serra's cinematography, John Beard's design and Sandy Powell's costumes create a ravishing look that never obscures the film's intelligence, nor masks its willingness to ask hard questions in a way more familiar from other kinds of cinema.

"So that's why you wanted me to come to Venice," Densher blurts out. "For her." "For her," Kate replies. "And for us." In that moment, they could be — well, who? Bogart and Gloria Grahame, perhaps, in Nick Ray's In A Lonely Place. A pair of lovers trapped by their own device, existing beyond time and place. Some costume drama, then. Some film.



Class act . . . Alison Elliott as Millie and Helena Bonham Carter as Kate Croy in The Wings Of The Dove

Theatre as a mirror of the world

Giorgio Strehler

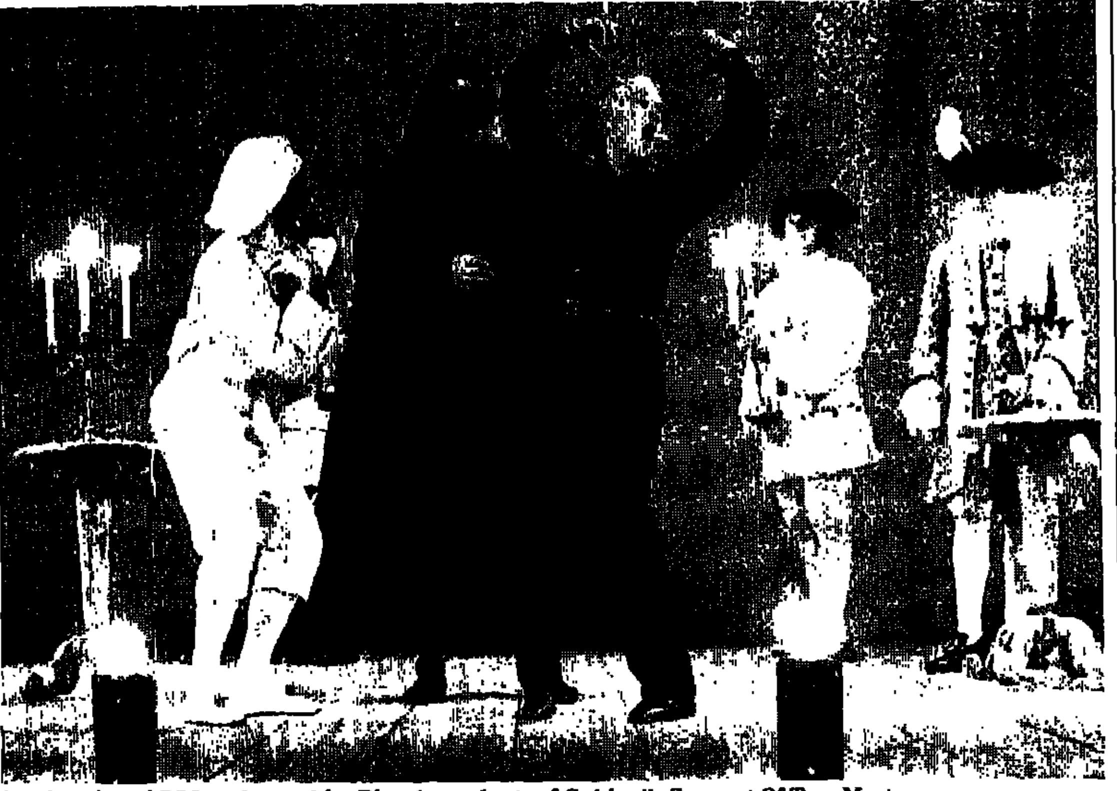
GIORGIO STREHLER, who has died aged 76, was the founder of Italy's longest running theatre company, the Piccolo Teatro of Milan, and considered one of Europe's major post-war theatre directors.

It was a cruel twist of fate that the vicissitudes of recent years concerning his management of the Piccolo which had driven him to resignation at the end of 1996 should result in him dying just as he had won his battle with bureaucracy and cleared his name over charges of misusing European Union funds. He was rehearsing a new production of Mozart's Cosi Fan Tutte with which he was to inaugurate the new Piccolo theatre he had waited more than 20 years to see built.

Strehler, born in Barcola on the outskirts of Trieste, gave up university studies early and went to Milan to study acting, making his stage debut in 1943. But he was more interested in directing, which he then studied in Geneva. It was there that, at the age of 26, he was invited by the distinguished Italian actor, Renzo Ricci, to direct him in Camus's Caligula. He returned to Italy in 1946 to direct for the company of actress Evi Maltagliati in Desire Under The Elms and Therese Raquin. In 1947, he set up the Piccolo company with Paolo Grassi, with whom he shared similar ideals of theatre.

Their professional relationship had its ups and downs over 30 years: in the 1960s Strehler left the Piccolo and formed a private company, but the prodigal son returned a year later. When it was Grassi's turn to leave, to take over La Scala opera house, it was Strehler who felt the break most.

The original Piccolo Teatro opened with Strehler's production of Gorky's Lower Depths. It was truly "piccolo" in size but from the start attracted full houses. Only at the end of that first season did Strehler stage Goldoni's Servant Of Two Masters, or Arlecchino as it is known to Italian audiences. "We didn't think there'd be much interest in it," Strehler said. "For me it was like an exercise in style, an exploration of the *commedia dell' arte*, which neither I nor the actor who was my first Harlequin, Marcello Moretti, knew much about." It was to become the most famous Italian production of all time.



Strehler in a 1980s rehearsal for Piccolo students of Goldoni's Servant Of Two Masters

Goldoni, along with Shakespeare, Chekhov and, above all, Brecht, were the dramatists with whom Strehler is most associated. After that first "exercise" of Arlecchino in 1947, each time he revived it over the years he brought a new approach to the play. He also succeeded in bringing many Goldonian biographical touches to his production of the Venetian dramatist's plays. In Le Barufle Chiozotte he showed a feeling for the cares of the fishermen and their women in Chioggia which highlighted Goldoni's own social awareness. Strehler's best Goldoni was the Country Life trilogy.

Although Strehler never toured the trilogy abroad, word of it had reached London and Laurence Olivier sent Ken Tynan to Italy to meet Strehler. I was roped in as interpreter. At a certain point, while Ken and I discussed which accent might be given to the country folk, Strehler asked me what we were talking about. I told him. He exploded: "I don't understand English and you expect me to worry about accent! Tell Olivier I'm flattered to be asked but he can forget about it."

Strehler never directed in English but he worked well in French and German. He had a special relationship with Brecht, whose plays he introduced to Italy, often provoking fury in the climate of cold-war Italian politics. His production of Life Of Galileo, in particular, caused Vatican protests, but it played to packed houses. A few weeks before Brecht's death in 1956, he was present at the Piccolo for Strehler's first staging of The Threepenny Opera, which he said was better than his own production.

He was married to the Austrian actress Andrea Jonasson.

Michael Billington adds: It was Strehler's work at the Paris Odeon in the 1980s that showed he was one of theatre's master-magicians. The Theatre de l'Europe was both an idealistic, cross-frontier venture and a framework for some of Strehler's finest productions, in particular Shakespeare's The Tempest, Corneille's L'Illusion and, of course, Goldoni's Arlecchino.

As a director, he was a tireless perfectionist, not to say something of an autocrat. I once watched him at work on L'Illusion and couldn't believe how often he jumped up on stage to demonstrate his ideas to the actors. But, whatever his methods, Strehler had a humanist belief in the theatre as a moral force and as a practical metaphor of an ideal Europe — "a Europe", as he once said, "of diversity and particularity".

John Francis Lane

Giorgio Strehler, theatre director, born August 14, 1921; died December 25, 1997

Legacy of the samurai

Toshiro Mifune

THE powerful, athletic and handsome Toshiro Mifune, who has died aged 77, was the engine-room of 16 of Akira Kurosawa's pictures, and because of them became the best-known Japanese actor outside Japan. The popularity of Kurosawa, the most celebrated of all Japanese film directors in the West, probably derives from his films' greater proximity to American films than those of his contemporaries.

The partnership between Kurosawa and Mifune began in 1948 and lasted until 1965 when there was a falling out, the reason for which both always refused to discuss.

Born to Japanese parents in Tsingtao, China, Mifune served in the Japanese army during the second world war. He then entered the Toho film studio and was given a small part in Kajiro Yamamoto's The Foolish Times (1946). But it was Kurosawa's Drunken Angel (1948) that made Mifune a star. He played a young gangster who comes to a doctor's surgery one night to have a bullet removed, but is discovered to have TB. Although Kurosawa's first important film has been compared with the Italian Neo-Realists, it comes closer to a Warner Bros' gangster film of the 1930s, the James Cagney role being taken by Mifune.

Rashomon (1950), the first Japanese film to be shown widely in the West, saw Mifune playing a cynical bandit who kills a samurai and rapes his wife. At the subsequent trial, the incident is described in four conflicting versions, demonstrating the subjective nature of truth. (It became a Paul Newman Western, The Outrage, in 1964.)

In 1954 Mifune gave his most famous performance in Kurosawa's universally acclaimed The Seven Samurai (which would spawn The



Toshiro Mifune: multi-talented

Magnificent Seven in 1960). As the wild, loud-mouthed would-be samurai, he revealed what an extraordinary actor he was, ranging from slapstick comedy to pathos. When he is unmasked as a farmer's son and not a nobleman as he claimed, he delivers an unforgettably emotional speech to the warriors.

Mifune was most often seen and appreciated as a samurai, whether the Japanese Macbeth in Throne Of Blood (1957), said to be T S Eliot's favourite film, grotesquely humorous in The Hidden Fortress (1958), or splendidly heroic in Yojimbo (1961) for which he won the best actor prize in Venice. (Yojimbo became A Fistful Of Dollars with Clint Eastwood.)

The last film Mifune made for Kurosawa, Red Beard (1965), won him another acting award at Venice.

Mifune was never as impressive for other directors. Although he could barely speak English, he appeared in a number of US-produced films in the 1960s and 1970s, in which little use was made of his talent. The one decent role he had in the West was as a Japanese naval commander stranded on a Pacific atoll in John Boorman's Hell In The Pacific (1969).

But to see the best of Toshiro Mifune, who is survived by two sons, one has to go back to the Kurosawa films and his dynamic presence in them.

Ronald Bergan

Toshiro Mifune, actor, born April 1, 1920; died December 24, 1997

Gentle art of a fine satirist

Juzo Itami

JUZO ITAMI, the film director who revitalised the Japanese film industry in the 1980s with its biting social satires, has committed suicide, aged 64. He did so by jumping off the roof of the eight-storey building in Tokyo where he had his offices. He leaves two sons and a widow, Nobuko Miyamoto, the star of most of his films.

It was she who influenced her husband's constant use of strong women characters, comparatively rare in films by male Japanese directors, who traditionally see women as victims. Itami also mocked hitherto taboo subjects, and entered areas that even put his life in danger.

In 1992, a few days after the premiere of The Gentle Art Of Japanese Extortion aka Gangster's Moll (Minbo No Onna), a satire of the *yakuza*, the crime syndicate, his face and neck were slashed with a knife by five members of the *yakuza*. "I won't be giving up," Itami wrote from his hospital bed.

On his recovery, he refused to be silenced, and took part in a witness protection programme. (In 1996 the attackers were convicted and sent to prison.) His defiance of the yakuza culminated in his 10th and final film, Women Of The Police Protection Programme (Marutai No Onna, 1997), about an actress (Miyamoto) placed under guard after she witnesses a murder while under threat from the perpetrators. Unfortunately, it failed at the box-office.

Juzo Itami, born in Kyoto, was a descendant of samurai and the son of Mansaku Itami, a pioneer Japanese film director. However, it took him until his 50th birthday before attempting to emulate his father. Previously, he had been a painter, writer and actor, appearing in two Hollywood epics, 55 Days At Peking (1963) and Lord Jim (1965).

His first film as director was The Funeral (1984), a black comedy peopled with richly-drawn characters.

Tampopo (1986) was one of the first films that began an international fad of "meals on reels". It told of a truck driver (Tsutomu Yamazaki), who pulls in for a snack at a wayside noodle shop run by the widowed Tampopo (Miyamoto). Finding the food uneatable, he stays to help her turn the place into one of the best restaurants in the country. A gastronomic comedy of table manners, it satirised Japanese social mores in a series of vignettes. Itami called it a "noodle Western".

Even more of a triumph was A Taxing Woman (1987) about the life of an eager-beaver tax inspector (Miyamoto). The detailed observation of the heroine's profession is as obsessive as in Robert Bresson's Pickpocket, but to satiric ends. The film also demonstrated Itami's talent in moving from comedy to the realism of the gangster movie, from harsh to tender moments.

Unfortunately, a bigger budget led the director into a slick repetition of formula and a more conventional narrative structure. His later films lacked the freshness and surprise of those of the 1980s when he was the bright new meteor of Japanese cinema.

Ronald Bergan

Juzo Itami, film director and actor, born 1933; died December 21, 1997

Bitter fruits of diplomacy

Nick Cohen

Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger
by Christopher Hitchens
Verso 178pp £13

HENRY KISSINGER is best remembered for minting the dirty old man's maxim that power is a great aphrodisiac. If you wish to recall instead the hundreds of thousands who died as a result of his acts of commission and omission in Cambodia, Vietnam, East Timor, Bangladesh, Cyprus and Chile, you run the risk of being called an old leftie and of having to live with the resultant social disgrace. In New York, Kissinger's place in respectable society is so secure that the city's leading Jewish organisation could ask him, without irony, to present its 1997 Humanitarian of the Year award to Rupert Murdoch, of all people. In London, the equally forgetful Tony Blair received Kissinger in Downing Street last year. The old statesman gave his young disciple the benefit of his geopolitical wisdom. They had met in New York and were "friends", said a Downing Street spokesman.

Christopher Hitchens takes as his epigraph Milan Kundera's warning that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". He has updated his history of the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and I doubt new readers will forget it in a hurry. Hitchens does not deny that ethnic tensions between the Greek majority and the island's Turks existed, but shows, devastatingly, how they were heightened and exploited by outside powers who agreed on one particular only: the views of the peoples of Cyprus were an irrelevance.

First in the post-war imperial playground were the British, keen, as always, to divide and rule. "Harold Macmillan [Foreign Secretary in 1954] was urging us to stir up the Turks in order to neutralise Greek agitation," a civil servant recorded. And stir them up we — or rather they — did by allowing neo-fascist Turkish parties to organise while Greek Cypriot parties were banned, and by leaving Turkish terrorists unprosecuted. The standard FO view — last seen in all its glory in Bosnia — is that it is impossible for different peoples to live together, and all we can hope for is a "level killing field". But, as Hitchens points out, there was little ethnic tension in Cyprus until the British encouraged its growth.

The British left Cyprus with an unworkable constitution and handed the imperial burden to the United States. America had two interests: to keep Greece and Turkey in Nato; and to assuage its paranoid fears that a quasi-independent Cyprus under Archbishop Makarios could somehow be a Mediterranean Cuba. US policy was to support Greek extremists opposed to Makarios and more than willing to massacre Turks. Tensions between the Greeks and Turks were, inevitably, inflamed and partition became the US's favoured solution. In 1964, when the Greek ambassador to Washington told President Johnson that partition was unacceptable, the leader of the free world showed his respect for democracy by replying: "Fuck your parliament and your constitution. America is an elephant, Cyprus is a flea. Greece is a flea. If these two fleas continue itching the elephant, they may just get whacked by the elephant's trunk, whacked good."

In 1967 the Greek colonels seized power with American support. Hitchens details US involvement in the Greek fascist plans to assassinate Makarios. "Christian" Greek Cyprus was to be united with mainland Greece, and if that meant the colonels had to appease the US by allowing the Turks to take the partially Turkish North then so be it.

After 1968 Kissinger protected a junta whose supporters had funded Richard Nixon's campaign, and supported its coup against Makarios. As Greek chauvinists tried to take control, Kissinger switched sides and said the Turkish community in Cyprus needed "a greater degree of autonomy". Ankara understood "the signal" and invaded.

Civilians were butchered and thousands were driven from their homes as partitioned Cyprus was ethnically cleansed. The raping of Greek women was so widespread the Orthodox Church felt compelled to relax its prohibition on abortion. Hitchens does not minimise the suffering of the Turks, but shows that partition has not brought them happiness. Northern Cyprus is a gangster state symbolised by Asil Nadir: rich, criminal and a corrupter of politicians.

Now Britain has a Labour government which will have to deal with the unresolved Cyprus question. I might hope Robin Cook will read Hitchens and learn from him. But there is little room for optimism. Kissinger persuaded the last Labour government to renege on Britain's treaty obligations to protect Cyprus. British troops looked on while civilians were massacred. James Callaghan and Roy Hattersley bowed to Kissinger's demand to deport Turks seeking sanctuary in a British base to Turkey — even though they were desperate to return to their homes in "Greek" Cyprus. Many arms were twisted to stop the Commons Cyprus Committee condemning Callaghan for his "profoundly depressing lack of initiative".

Now that another unembarrassable Labour leader is once again fawning over the old monster, we should perhaps reflect that Kissinger, for once, nearly got it right. Power is a great amnesiac.

The band that runs and runs

Russell Davies

The Beatles: Sgt Pepper
by Allan F. Moore
Cambridge 110pp
£24.95 (hbk); £7.95 (pbk)

"**I**T WAS 20 years ago today" are the first words sung on the Beatles' album Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and now more than 30 years have passed since its issue in 1967. The sense of throwback already implied by the record has been easily outdistanced by history; yet this odd collection of songs, showing off its creators in sateen Ruritanian uniforms, is still seen as a living thing.

Much effort has been expended over the years in trying to determine whether Pepper can claim a real artistic unity. Critical apprehension and even guilt were involved here: are we glorifying a clever but essentially fraudulent piece of salesmanship? Have the gaudy Peter Blake artwork, the elision of one song into the next and — a pioneering piece of bravado — the printed-out lyrics persuaded us to call a ragbag a suite?

I don't believe this was a problem, either way, for listeners at the time. For though the Beatles certainly opened the proceedings by stating "We're Sgt Pepper's Band", nobody thought of them as "being" the sergeant's crew, any more than we thought of John Cleese and company, their contemporaries, as "being" Monty Python's Flying Circus. Such titles, reminiscent of ancient brand-names and their packaging (Dr Collis Browne's Compound, Uncle Joe's Mint Balls and so on), were gateways to fantasy, but committed their bearers to nothing.

What Sgt Pepper's opener actually did was to say the Beatles' farewell to the touring life they had now quit, through ironic quotes from the stage demeanour that Lennon, especially, scorned ("you're such a lovely audience") and the feeble bill-matter ("guaranteed to raise a smile") that would no longer speak on their behalf. And all this was put over in a stirringly non-matching musical idiom — not confiding or cajoling, but McCartney's top-of-the-range rock 'n' roll holler, against snarling guitars.



The Beatles in 1967, the year of Sgt. Pepper and Magical Mystery Tour PHOTO: APPLE CORP LTD

Rather sweetly, the Beatles proceeded to follow best showbiz practice by placing second on the bill their most vulnerable item — avowedly so, with Ringo, long the target of can't-sing jibes, craving indulgence ("I'll try not to sing out of key"). That song over, the Pepperish audience-consciousness of the album was abruptly dropped, not to be referred to again until "Being For the Benefit of Mr Kite" revived it in an even more (verbally) archaic style, famously borrowed from a poster.

The only song on the album that might belong to the repertoire of a "real" Sgt Pepper, as we understand him to be ("the act you've known for all these years"), is "When I'm Sixty-Four" — much despised, to this day, by rock-pop specialists, but eagerly seized on in 1967 by the student jazz-band in which I was playing. Within a month, we were reproducing the "new" tune, bass clarinet and all (our arranger, happily, is now professor of music at Liverpool university), though I believe we were privately disappointed in the Beatles for having issued something we could mimic. Interestingly, it turned out that an early version of "Sixty-Four" had been their Cavern Club stand-by number whenever the electricity failed — and a severe drop in voltage was precisely what it now produced on record.

Allan F Moore's natty volume suffers from being the first in the long Music Handbook series to treat a "popular song", so that a good deal of elaborate justification (chiefly sociological) has to take place before he gets down to the disc itself. When he does, he meets a difficulty in identifying particular passages in terms of choruses or bar numbers, so irregular are many of the songs; but this he solves sensibly by citing CD timings instead. Having brought the CD specifically for the purpose of following him, I must say it's the worst example I've met of that technology's notorious tendency to impose a dried-out, detached feel on music that had felt warmly organic on vinyl.

One could wish that Moore had been less assiduous in reading up previous accounts of these songs. What he himself thinks too often sinks under the weight of what Middleton, Mellers or MacDonald have written. He also perpetuates a pointlessly mollifying line on the drug content of the album. Can we not finally admit that even if the infant Julian Lennon did paint friend Lucy in the sky with diamonds, the song of that name remains a tour-guide's text on the perceptual effects of LSD?

Some points gathered in from elsewhere feel weighty. The critic who drew a parallel with Eliot's The Waste Land was certainly on to something, and not just because of the strong elements of cut-and-paste in both productions. Commentators insisting on the relentless Britishness of Pepper have made a good point: I remember being disturbed that one grandchild in "Sixty Four" was called Chuck. It sounded jarringly American, though "chuck" is a Lancashire term of endearment.

Moore is at his strongest on the musical architecture of the songs, where he seems better able to trust himself. The attention he draws to Ringo Starr's underrated contribution is most welcome, and his alertness to stray remarks, both verbal and musical, suggests that he's been listening on an excellent pair of headphones. Indeed, a growing attraction of Beatles productions by 1967 was their exoskeletal tendency, with some bones of production — count-ins, laughter, instructions — showing through autobiographically.

Anyone interested in assessing what is valuable about popular song will wish to get to grips with this book, though not for the sake of its final paragraph: "And so, with these intentionally vague pointers towards a whole new contextualisation, it seems to me that Sgt Pepper will, indeed, grow to command that space between Schoenberg and his voice and, in so doing, will confirm the damming of that mainstream, marking the paradigmatic shift towards a more flexible, less guilt-ridden appropriation and utilisation of musical materials."

Those words may harmonise well with the expectations of the syndics of the Cambridge University Press, but as a conclusion to a book of this kind they are rather less appealing than the nonsense in Sgt Pepper's run-out groove.

Poetry

Robert Potts

Bestiary, by Helen Dunmore (Bloodaxe, £6.95)

WHEN a shop owner is described, almost off-handedly, in the phrase "His would be the last face that saw them / before an abduction", you know you are in chilly territory.

Helen Dunmore is a poet who relies on a quiet potency of image or phrase rather than any unusual stylistic or metrical technique; in this suite of pieces, in which the beasts described are within us rather than without, this is frequently successful. The poems encompass the costly human denial of such darkness — "and what we cannot help wanting / we banish — the barn yawn, the cow breath, / the stickiness we come from".

The Invisible Mender, by Sarah Maguire (Cape, £7)

SARAH MAGUIRE'S poem "Spilt Milk", from her first collection, is still one of my favourite poems on fellatio and adultery, and in The Invisible Mender she is still an erotic writer, albeit more unsettlingly than most.

This new volume is preoccupied by exclusion and inclusion — prisons, class, territory, caste, gender — and retains a sense that in sexual connection people, however briefly, come together (so to speak). Sensitively illuminates the fugitive, the dispossessed and the diseased.

The Vigil, by C K Williams (Bloodaxe, £7.95)

WILLIAMS is an undeniably great and original writer; his long-lined poems wrestle and nag at their subjects, sinewy, tightening — they are not "emotion recollected in tranquillity" but acts of recognition, memory, realisation. The conversational tone disguises the moral and psychological journeys undertaken, in which every nervy qualification is actually the mind stripping itself down to honesty, or buried guilt being exercised and exorcised.

A Bird's Idea of Flight, by David Harsent (Faber, £7.99)

DAVID HARSENT has been working with long sequences, dream poems, and narratives for some time now, and A Bird's Idea Of Flight is a unified volume, elliptical, mystical, teasing. The style is engaging: confidently conversational, smart in its half- or quarter-rhymes, enjoying and highlighting accidental homophonies.

In other words, it's very much like reading Paul Muldoon. This isn't a criticism, but it is a problem, because Muldoon's terrifyingly brilliant architecture is always going to dwarf the little churches built by others.



James Salter . . . writes wonderfully of a world few of his readers will have known PHOTO: LINDA GIRVIN

Fighter pilot, novelist, womaniser

John Mortimer

Burning the Days
by James Salter
Harvill 320pp £17

SCOTT FITZGERALD never overcame his sense of guilt at not having fought in the first world war. Novelist James Salter, once a boy soldier in white trousers and a shako, the impeccable uniform of West Point, became a fighter pilot. The experience was clearly profound. Nothing else in the long and, on the whole, enviable life chronicled in this book — the frequent love affairs with invariably beautiful women; the film scripts and novels and trips to Rome, Paris and Hawaii; the meetings with Fellini and Irwin Shaw — seems to compare to the excitement of spinning through the air and chasing MiG fighters out of Korean skies. In his account of these battles Salter's prose, always beautifully controlled, crackles and bursts into flame:

"It was not duty, it was desire. Duty would not search with such avidity in the waning light, coming down the river one last time, the earth already in darkness that was rising slowly, like a tide, the heavens being the last to go. A strange high sound begins in the earphones: gun-laying radar. Along the river a final time. Near its mouth the darkened earth begins to light up, first in one place and then another, like a city come to life. Soon the entire ground is flashing. They are firing at us far below. Black shellbursts, silent, appear around us, some showing an unexpected red core. It was victory we longed for and imagined. You could not steal or be given it. No man on earth was rich enough to buy it and it was worth nothing. In the end it was worth nothing at all."

Salter writes wonderfully of a world most of his readers will never have known, the nearness of death, the companionship of brother officers and the intoxication of battle. If this account had been written by an English airman it would be more self-ridiculing and sprinkled with jokes. Salter's prose is hardly a vehicle for jokes.

And yet at the end of the book, when he is an old man coming home from a restaurant with his wife and friends, and they light the fire and read aloud from their favourite books, while the others choose Joyce, or Tolstoy, or Robert Service, James Salter picks the closing, patriotic speech in Noël Coward's Cavalcade. Unlike any contemporary English writer, he probably read it without sending it up.

But, from all the elegant writing, a great deal is missing. Salter not only does not tell us what the Korean war was for, he gives us no real insight into what he thought of it at the time. Did he think about nothing but flirting with the speed of sound, the eccentricities of the old flyers and the terror of seeing the fuel gauge drop to nought at 30,000 feet? Did he worry about the point and purpose of the killing?

There are similar expanses of uncharted territory. He becomes a film writer, successful enough to stay in the best hotels and sail across the Atlantic, but we don't hear about the films or whether he enjoyed or hated writing them. He gets married and has four children, but we scarcely learn the wife's name and she never emerges as a character

The beautiful girls, found at railway stations, or married to other officers, are seen sitting at their dressing-tables or taking off their clothes to reveal astonishing beauty. But they often have no names and when they do, as in the case of Sis Chandler, a naval officer's wife he made love to in a Hawaiian cane field, he can no longer remember the colour of her hair or what she looked like.

It's hard to know why he tells us so little about the people he loved. It could be put down to a sort of acquired English reserve, as if Salter had become, with his admiration for Cavalcade, a Noël Coward captain of a battleship. But when he wants to he can bring a character to life in a sentence. We got a momentary glimpse of Nedra, who had been the model for a stylish woman in his novel Light Years. He writes: "The years had seized and shaken her as a cat shakes a mouse."

The men he admires do better. Irwin Shaw gets around two dozen pages. Of Shaw he writes: "Time with its broad thumb had blurred nothing." Shaw was not, apparently, a modest man. At a drinks party he was compared to Balzac. Shaw said no, he wrote better than Balzac. "In French he's hasty — he writes very short sentences."

At the same party someone said to Shaw's wife Marian, "I love being a writer's wife, don't you?" To which Marian answered, honestly: "No." Being a writer's wife, clearly, entitles you to only two pages in a lengthy autobiography.

And yet reading this life, for all its black holes and closed doors, you come across constant pleasures. Sometimes it's the exact insight of a single phrase. Salter discovers that some young girls had been reading The Story Of O at summer camp and talked about it incessantly. He writes, "I felt disappointed. If schoolgirls could stroll through it like a book group, what was there to safekeep?"

This is a writer who does little to woo the audience but who uses the language in a way which is a lesson to a slipshod generation. At the end, when the old Salter combs his hair, he looks in a mirror and says: "I had seen worse." You can't help feeling touched and respectful, and thinking he's probably right.

Travels with my angst

Andrew Motion

Selected Letters of
Robert Louis Stevenson
Edited by Ernest Mehew
Yale 608pp £19.95

IN OCTOBER 1893, a little over a year before he died at the age of 44, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to his friend George Meredith: "For 14 years I have not had a day's real health. I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary; and I have done my work unflinchingly." It was a brave confession — not least because it ran the risk of making "work" sound like mere labour. In fact, one of the most engaging things about Stevenson's fiction is its quick lightness — its way (in Treasure Island, Kidnapped, Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde, pre-eminently) of turning deep questions into ripping yarns; of giving us unforgettable individuals while investigating psychological types.

The same is true of his letters. This selection, which contains around 300 of the nearly 3,000 that Ernest Mehew has already printed in his magnificent eight-volume edition (published in 1994-95), shows his brilliance sparkling on every page. As in the fiction, there is little straightforward philosophising, little self-reflecting inquiry into aims and methods, and a degree of reserve about the details of his private life — and of his marriage in particular. In every other respect, the book is wonderfully abundant and gives a compelling portrait of a man whose capacity for making friendships was fuelled by his difficulties in maintaining them.

Not that this implies any deficiency in him except good health. Even as a very young man, Stevenson's frailty forced him to admit that "a three-mile walk" was "a good stretch for me", and in later years, as his TB took hold, his best efforts were "written in bed, written out of it, written in haemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness". Amazingly, there is almost no self-pity in his account of these difficulties — only a tacit recognition that the precariousness of his life made him value his experience, and his correspondents, even more highly than he might otherwise have done.

Like many consumptives before him, Stevenson scoured the globe for a climate which might help him recover. Yet as we follow him to England ("I feel as strange and outlandish here, as I do in France or Germany"), to France, to the west coast of America, and finally to the South Seas, we watch his travels not just exhausting, but enabling him. Travel, like the ill-health which occasioned it, was the means by which Stevenson maintained the sense of exclusion that fed his writing.

As a rule he kept the shape of his letter-world intact from the moment he became seriously peripatetic. There are rows with his father. There is the quickening of his friendship with Henry James, and of his nervous interest in Kipling (whom he was keen to pigeonhole as an inferior version of himself). But around and beneath these passages of white water runs the current of his affection for his mother, his soul mate Sidney Colvin, the Edinburgh solicitor Charles Baxter, and a few other intimates.

Some of the most heartfelt moments in his letters are descriptions which body forth an interior condition — as in this letter to Colvin written in June 1889 from Honolulu:

"Mighty mountain walls descending sheer along the whole face of the island into a sea unusually deep; the front of the mountain ivied and furred with clinging forest, one viridescent cliff: about half-way from east to west, the low, bare, stony promontory in between the cliff and the ocean; the two little towns . . . seated on either side of it, as bare almost as bathing machines upon a beach; and the population — gorgons and chimeras dire."

Colvin, Keats's biographer, could hardly have read this without being reminded of "Hyperion". This volume doesn't have the profundity of Keats's letters, but its generosity recalls them. It's an exhilarating read.

Everyone's future on the line

Victor Keegan

The Death of Distance
by Frances Cairncross
Orion 288pp £18.99

THIS IS a vibrant time to be writing about the communications revolution, and this book — combining the author's deep knowledge of media and economics — provides a thorough account of the forces that shaped it and the bounty it may deliver.

We are now entering the crucial period that will decide whether stunning developments such as the Internet continue to be the preserve of the better-off or whether they gather enough momentum to become a mass movement providing (electronic) equality of opportunity for everyone including the poor.

The revolution has come about because of several simultaneous breakthroughs: the huge capacity of fibre-optic telephone lines; digitisation, enabling books and images to be broken down into the ones and noughts of computer code and dispatched at unimaginable speed down telephone wires; third, the huge drop in computer prices enabling us to buy for under $1,500 a desktop model that would have needed the Albert Hall to house it a few decades ago.

The trouble is that computers and necessary peripherals still cost at least $1,500. But this may be about to change as new devices costing around $500 tempt people to receive the wonders of the Internet through their existing television sets. The mass market beckons.

But will it happen? Frances Cairncross's highly readable analysis is unashamedly optimistic about how all this will revolutionise our lives including reshaping cities, cutting commuting, abolishing the office as a place to work, reducing the power of the state, cutting crime and even helping to bring about world peace.

It may do much of this. But the trouble with predicting the effects of a revolution moving as fast as this one is that forecasts soon get overtaken by developments. If this book had been written five years ago it would not have mentioned the World Wide Web, the Internet or "browsers" which navigate us around this bottomless ocean of knowledge. They hadn't really got off the ground then, yet they are now the main arteries of the information highway. Yet more innovations — such as sending Internet signals down electricity wires — have opened up new avenues since the book was finished in July.

Some of the author's predictions — such as the erosion of tax revenues because of globalisation — may well come true, though not necessarily with the consequences she predicts (further cuts in public spending). Why? Because there are other ways for governments to raise money either immune from technological change such as taxes on land and property) or spawned by it — such as the possibility of a small, globally agreed tax on international transactions in foreign currencies (most of which are channelled through a single computer complex in the United States).

In the end, nations will spend less on their welfare states only if they want to, not because digital pressures force them to. It is even possible that the death of distance has, Twain-like, been greatly exaggerated. Frances Cairncross turns the Death of Distance from a catchy, alliterative title — albeit somewhat hyperbolic — into a mantra repeated almost too regularly throughout the text. It begins to sound like the Force that is governing our lives. It isn't. It is having a dramatic effect on a small though growing part of our activities.

Just remind yourself about the proportion of your income that is actually spent on material things and services which haven't much changed — and that includes computers which are physical objects assembled in factories and transported across distances. This is not to underestimate what is happening as a result of the convergence of computers, telephony and television sets. It is likely to have at least as profound an effect on the economy as electricity, only much faster. The Internet alone is rapidly becoming the universal source of instantaneous knowledge. For academic disciplines such as physics, which rely on regularly updated theories, it has virtually replaced books. The main danger is that far from bringing nirvana it will merely widen the gap between rich and poor by creating a new "digitariat" of people unable even to afford the new low-cost network computers. This unfortunate scenario would give added advantage to those schoolchildren who are on-line at home (with access to numerous homework cribs) at the expense of those whose incentiveless existence is worsened by deteriorating access to knowledge.

And the gap between the developed and developing countries could get even wider. East Asia has espoused the revolution with relish. But what will happen to Africa with no money and no infrastructure? It's true that satellites, courtesy of Microsoft and others, may soon be passing overhead but to what will they beam down their digits if there is no receiving equipment? It will be like solar energy. Africa has this in abundance but market forces aren't enough to translate it into industrial progress on the ground.

But you don't need to be seduced by the promise of a digital Utopia to learn a lot from this impressive book, which embraces everything from the public-sector origins of the Internet in the US to the underlying economics and competition problems with Microsoft. It repeats one or two myths, including the story that the Internet was constructed to preserve information in case of a nuclear war (it wasn't).

Also the statistic that 40 per cent of US households have computers is inflated by the inclusion of computer games consoles, which aren't in the British figures. The Americans are so far ahead of the rest of the world in the manufacture of the hardware and software of the information revolution that we shouldn't deny ourselves the advantage of being well-versed in the use we make of them. Maybe it's our only hope.

Forgotten victims of war

Nikolai Tolstoy

Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians under Allied Occupation 1944-1950
by James Bacque
Little, Brown 288pp £18.99

JAMES BACQUE'S previous book, Other Losses, provoked a worldwide furore. His thesis was that about a million German prisoners-of-war died in American and French camps after the capitulation in 1945, and that their respective governments had thereafter suppressed the evidence of this cruelty and neglect. It was largely the enormity of the figure which led to the torrents of abuse heaped upon Bacque, and the issue understandably remains controversial.

But while statistics are clearly important, they are neither the sole nor necessarily the weightiest factor where human suffering is concerned. Bacque's indictment is succinctly stated: "At least 9.3 million Germans died needlessly soon after the war, the great majority because of the conditions imposed by the four major victors. This is many more Germans than died in battle, air raids and concentration camps during the war. Millions of these people slowly starved to death in front of the victors' eyes every day for years. These deaths have never been honestly reported by either the Allies or the German government."

That great numbers of helpless people died during mass expulsions from former German territory occupied by the Poles, Czechs and Russians, and through malnutrition in the occupied zones into which they were driven, is indisputable. Eyewitness accounts, cited by the author in abundance, testify to the horrific reality, and it appears that statistics of the enormously increased death rate have indeed been tampered with by interested parties.

It is to the honour of Britain that its zone of occupation appears to have been the best-administered of the four: a considerable achievement in view of the dire situation back home. My father-in-law, then serving in the British army of occupation, recalls having to wear an overcoat indoors throughout the winter on account of the lack of heating in officers' quarters. As he observes, victorious armies are not generally keen to share the privations of their defeated foes.

Critics of Other Losses focused almost exclusively on the statistical aspect of Bacque's indictment, seeking thereby to mitigate the horrors he described. Professor Michael Howard declined to accept the evidence for a huge casualty rate among German PoWs on the grounds that "inherent probability" precluded the possibility of such a high figure. John Keegan, another of the "drum and trumpet" school of British military historians, similarly rejected the evidence wholesale.

Behind these objections appears to lie the illogical fear that German suffering could detract from the purity of the Allied crusade to liberate Europe. That millions of innocent Germans suffered dreadfully, and in many cases died needlessly, cannot conceivably be held to mitigate Germany's responsibility for military aggression, nor detract from the ghastliness of Nazi crimes against humanity.

Crimes And Mercies presents a powerful indictment of actions perpetrated by some of the victors of the second world war. Any notion that this can somehow be regarded as tolerable on grounds of the collective guilt of the Germans is to accept the standards of those with whom we were obliged to go to war. Worse still, crimes concealed are likely to become crimes repeated.

In any case this undeniably grim story is far from being one of contrasted black and white. The author dwells as illuminatingly on the unstinting and largely unsung struggle to aid the oppressed waged by generous-hearted men such as Herbert Hoover and Victor Gollancz, as he does on the callous or witless actions of men of less chivalrous spirit.

Flippery embrace at sea

Mark Cocker

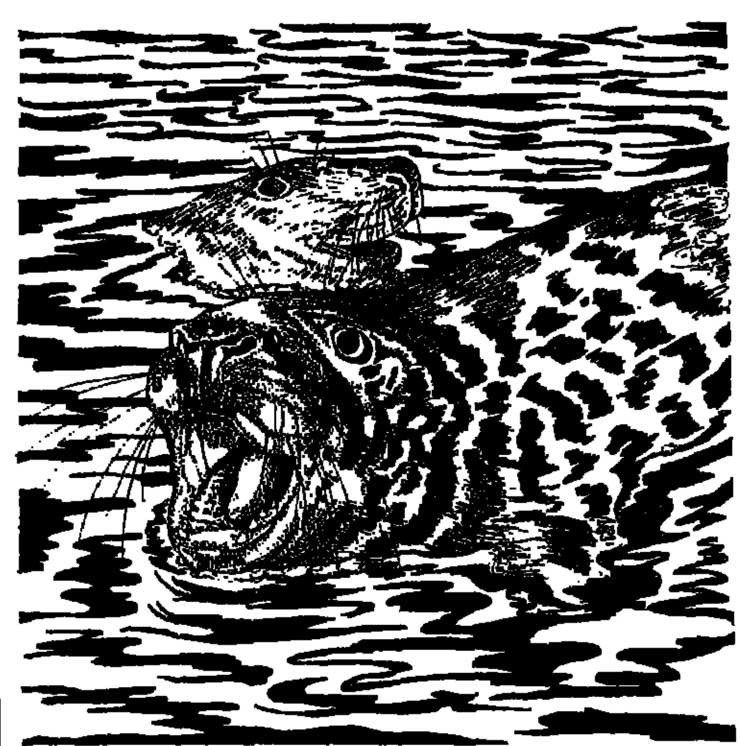


ILLUSTRATION ANN HOBDAY

THE National Trust reserve at Blakeney Point is one of most powerfully atmospheric locations in all East Anglia. On a map its 5km-long shingle spit resembles the hooked talon of some vast bird clawing at the intertidal expanses between Morston and Wells on the Norfolk coast. In season it holds one of Britain's most important seabird colonies, thousands of terns and gulls skirling summer-long as they pursue a hectic round of courtship and breeding. But by winter the shingle ridges have fallen silent, and Blakeney assumes an impressive and desolate grandeur.

During my last visit, there was probably not another person abroad in the surrounding 10km stretch of coast. Certainly I did not see another soul all day. Howling northerlies buffeted Blakeney's only substantial building, the old lifeboat house and a seasonal headquarters for the warden and his summer staff. Now the quiet rattle of its locked doors and windows seemed only to intensify the sense of isolation.

Yet not everything felt out of place on this bitter afternoon. Far across the creek a group of common seals lolled at the tide edge, cocooned from the gale by their layers of blubber. At the mouth of the channel a female grey seal with her pup frolicked in the shallows. Briefly they shuffled on to the beach before returning to the icy comforts of the North Sea, where the mother embraced her offspring in an enfolding flipper.

These moments of tenderness, when set against the raw power of the wind and waves, seemed somehow to emphasise the animals' perfect adaptation to their marine environment. Normally grey seals have their pups in late autumn but sometimes they don't give birth until December. Despite the season, the mother's fish-rich diet means that she produces a milk supply of more than 50 per cent fat, and in two weeks the pup can triple in weight to 45kg. To find her prey the adult seal can dive deeper than 150 metres and remain submerged for more than 20 minutes. (Although this achievement pales into insignificance against the recorded feats of the Weddell seal. This Antarctic species can dive for more than an hour to 600 metres, at which depth the water pressure is 64kg per square centimetre.)

The capacity of seals to recover from serious decline is equally impressive. The grey, one of the largest seals in the world, has its main populations in British waters, where they were hunted almost to extinction by the turn of the century. However, protective legislation in 1914 and 1932 provided a vital breathing space, and greys began to return. By the 1960s the world population was estimated at more than 50,000. This almost doubled in 10 years, and by 1995 the British population alone numbered 105,000.

The common seal, the more numerous of the two species at Blakeney, provides a more recent example of these natural powers of increase. In 1988 the seal colony here, like many populations in the North Sea, was devastated by an epizootic, identified by some authorities as seal distemper. In total more than 17,000 seals died, and the Blakeney colony slumped from about 750 animals to just 260. Yet within a decade this total has almost doubled.

Even now, in the depths of winter, the seals' recovery campaign continues. Though they mate in summer or autumn, the implantation of the fertilised embryo is delayed for up to three months. The mother grey seal I saw frolicking so happily with her offspring will probably become pregnant again very soon and within weeks, possibly days, she will abandon this year's pup to concentrate on the coming generation.

Chess Leonard Barden

HASTINGS, **the UK's leading chess town, has announced that it is to create a centre of excellence which will host international tournaments, a daily, open-to-all club, a school for talented children and a British chess library.**

As a first step, Hastings Council has acquired a seafront freehold, though a further £1.6 million in Lottery funds and £400,000 in private sponsorship is still needed. If the concept succeeds, it will be a welcome replacement for the London Chess Centre in Oxford Street, destroyed by bombs in the Blitz of 1940, and for the Gambit Café off Cannon Street, which was demolished in 1959.

Meanwhile the 73rd Hastings, the chess world's longest-running annual congress, started last week. Awaiting the new centre, the congress's subsidiary tournaments have moved from the end of the pier to the YMCA on the top of a hill.

Luke McShane, aged 13, is taking on the grandmasters in the Premier at the Cinque Ports Hotel, breaking Nigel Short's record as the youngest invitee. Short made an impressive debut, defeating several grandmasters, but McShane faces a stiff test in a category 13 all-play-all whose required score for a GM performance is 5/9.

L McShane-M Turner, Hampstead Masters '97

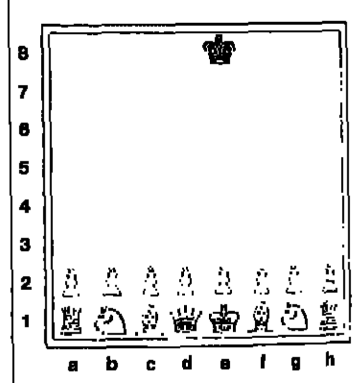
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 Nc3 fxe4 5 Nxe4 Nf6 Black's 3 ... f5 Schliemann Defence can surprise, but 5 ... d5 or earlier 4 ... Nd4 are the testing lines. As played, White has a riskless edge. **6 Qe2 d5 7 Nxf6+ gxf6 8 d4 Bg7 9 dxe5 0-0 10 Bxc6** 10 e6 Ne5 gives counterplay.

bxc6 11 e6 Re8 12 Be3 Bxe6 13 0-0-0 Qd7 14 Qd2 Bf7 15 h3 Rab8 16 Bc5 Qc8 17 Rhe1 Qa6 18 Rxe8+ Rxe8 19 Kb1 Bg6 20 Nd4 Qc4? Exchanging queens leads to a N v bad B endgame, but if Rb8 21 Ne6.

21 Qb4 Qxb4 22 Bxb4 Bf8 23 Bxf8 Kxf8 24 b4! a5? Conceding an outside passed pawn hastens defeat. **25 bxa5 c5 26 Nb3 c4 27 Nc5 c3 28 a6 c6 29 a4 Kf7 30 Ka2! Bxc2 31 Rc1 Bf5 32 g4 Be6 33 Re1 d4+ 34 Rxe6 Resigns.**

● Top-seeded Matthew Sadler played a strange draw at the Isle of Man Open against Latvia's Igor Rausis. All Black's pieces are on the back rank when White, a piece down, delivers perpetual check, which Black must accept because 15 ... Ke7? loses to 16 Qe5+: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 dxc4 4 e3 Be6 5 Nc3 b5 6 a4 b4 7 Na2 a5 8 Ng5 Bc8 9 Qh5 g6 10 Qf3 f6 11 Bxc4 fxg5 12 Qf7+ Kd7 13 Qe6+ Ke8 14 Qf7+ Kd7 15 Qe6+ Drawn.

No 2505



Today's puzzle was widely published as a mate in seven moves, starting 1 e4, 2 Qh5 and 3 Qd5. Then a lone solver from a small Dutch town refuted the experts and showed that White can mate in six. His answer contains more than 50 sequences, but White's first and second moves are identical in every case, while there are only two possible third moves, depending on where the BK goes. With these clues, can you work out or guess the three-move white sequence to force mate in six?

Quick crossword no. 400

Across

1 Hate (6)
4 Be able to pay for (6)
8 Roadside (5)
9 Unorthodox person (7)
10 (Gossip about) shocking affair (7)
11 Bitter and pungent (5)
12 Mother of kids (5-4)
17 Subsequent to (5)
19 Opening (7)
21 Screw with open rounded top (3,4)
22 English composer (5)
23 Destructive insect (6)
24 Religious officials (6)

Down

1 Invent or plan (6)
2 (Type of) ground (7)
3 Dispose of (time or money) (5)
4 [illegible] (of nonsense) (7)
6 Aquatic carnivore (5)
7 Make up your mind (6)
9 Tall garden flower (9)
13 Apprehensive (7)
14 Lever to operate gun (7)
15 Package (6)
16 Cordial (6)
18 Subject (5)
20 Perfect (5)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THIS column doesn't usually follow the seasonal trend to write about the dress of the year, or the wedding of the year, or the blocked drain of the year. But I am making an exception, for Geir Helgemo of Norway produced a piece of card play so breathtaking during the American Summer Nationals that the best bridge players in the world were talking about it in hushed and reverent tones for months afterwards. It was Hand Of The Year, all right, and it will be Hand Of The Millennium when 2000 rolls around (please, no letters claiming that ought to be 2001!)

Study Geir's problems from the beginning. Your hand as South at Game All is:

♠AK62 ♥None ♦AQJ9742 ♣A8

Your left-hand opponent opens two hearts, showing a weak hand with a five- or six-card heart suits. Your partner passes, and your right-hand opponent bids four hearts. What call would you make?

In this kind of position, it's very difficult to do anything that will enlist your partner's co-operation. You simply have to guess, and guess well. Geir, typically, went for the big prize with a jump to six diamonds, and that ended the bidding. West led the king of hearts, and this was what Geir could see (cover the East-West cards in the diagram, right).

Ruffing the opening lead, Helgemo laid down the ace of diamonds, to which each of his opponents followed suit. Now, he needed three tricks from the spade suit. Of course, this would be simple enough if the suit were to divide 3-3, but Helgemo looked deeply into the position.

He concluded from the bidding that West had only five hearts — East, with little strength, would not pre-empt all the way to four hearts without four-card support for his partner. To open a weak two bid with only a five-card suit, vulnerable, West would need some extra distributional strength. Perhaps, thought Helgemo, West had 5-5 in hearts and clubs, leaving him with only a doubleton spade ...

With only the most fragile of clues to go on, Helgemo made his plan.

He led a low spade from his hand, and when West played low, he finessed dummy's seven. East won the trick with the jack and immediately shot back a low spade. But Geir

North
♠973
♥9762
♦K1086
♣92

West
♠84
♥KQJ84
♦5
♣K10753

East
♠QJ105
♥A1053
♦3
♣QJ64

South
♠AK62
♥None
♦AQJ9742
♣A8

Helgemo calmly played low from his hand, and ...

As you can see, Helgemo had found the only way to make the contract. East, appreciating the position, had done well to return a spade at once, putting Geir under immediate pressure. Had he not done so, Helgemo would have crossed to dummy in diamonds and led the nine of spades, covered by the ten and king, pinning the eight. Then, Helgemo would go to dummy again in trumps and finesse the six of spades for his contract! You may not play that well in 1998, but have a great year, just the same. ©

Rugby Union Tetley's Bitter Cup fourth round: Wasps 31 Harlequins 26

Wasps sting Quins

Robert Armstrong

WASPS hammered out a bold warning that they are back in business with a first cup victory over their London rivals that fired the spirits of their supporters in bitterly cold conditions at Loftus Road last Sunday. Gareth Rees, who scored 16 points in a howling gale, was the scourge of the bemused Harlequins, who were dumped out of the competition despite outscoring their hosts by four tries to three.

Rees's invaluable tally of four penalties and two conversions, supplemented with tries by Damian Cronin, Laurence Scrase and Buster White, left the erratic Quins playing catch-up rugby for most of a difficult afternoon. Jamie Williams, Quins' pacy New Zealand wing, scored a hat-trick of tries that ultimately proved to be an irrelevance in view of Wasps' streetwise ability to keep their noses in front.

Wasps looked hungrier and more organised than Quins in their pursuit of the loose ball, often getting an extra man to the breakdown to recycle possession through successive phases. Lawrence Dallaglio, the captain, was in imperious form at the rucks and mauls, directing teammates to the critical areas and making important tackles that tended to disrupt the Quins' midfield.

In contrast Quins were prone to rely on flashes of individual brilliance, particularly by their three-quarters, to pressure the Wasps defence. Occasionally their flankers Rory Jenkins and Laurent Cabannes made a determined effort to develop a driving game through the middle but the obdurate defensive work of White and Peter Scrivener made it hard for them to establish a working platform.

Thierry Lacroix, the Quins' goalkicker, gave his side the lead early on with a 25-metre penalty for offside, an offence that often went unpunished by the referee Tony Spreadbury. However, Wasps soon forged ahead thanks to a 15th-minute try by the former Scotland lock Cronin.

Midway through the half Rees kicked his first penalty, a superb 40-metre effort into a crossfield wind which put Wasps 8-3 ahead. Shortly afterwards the industrious White was held up 1 metre from the Quins' line but on the half-hour Wasps went further ahead when their centre Scrase intercepted a loose pass by Lacroix and scampered 50 metres to score between the posts.

Visibly stung by the 15-3 deficit, Quins promptly raised the tempo, winning a penalty for a ruck offence which Lacroix converted from 25 metres. Two minutes before the interval Williams capitalised on Quins' new-found momentum, taking a short transfer from Tulsen Tollett and gliding down the left touchline to score at the flag. There was still time for Rees to land a towering 40-metre penalty which left Wasps with an 18-11 half-time lead.

Quins narrowed the gap soon after the interval with a counter-attacking try by their full-back Scott Stewart in the right corner. On the hour Williams plundered his second try in the same spot to level the scores at 21-21, Rees having kicked a third penalty for Wasps minutes earlier. However, within five minutes the hosts surged into a 10-point lead thanks to the ultra-competitive White, who scored a short-range try from a ruck on the left, and the consistent boot of Rees, who landed a tricky penalty and a conversion from an oblique angle on that side.

● In other matches, Newcastle saw off Exeter 34-10, Northampton beat Bedford 31-26, London Irish defeated Manchester 36-13, and Gloucester disposed of London Welsh 34-18. There were also victories for Rotherham, Newbury, Fylde, and Richmond. Bad weather hit many other games.

Wasps scrum-half Mike Friday is halted on the line PHOTO TOM JENKINS

Cricket Second Test: Australia v South Africa

Destroyer Warne joins bowling élite

Bruce Herford in Sydney

SHANE WARNE may have had a little local difficulty with his waistline of late but he can still turn his arm over to dramatic effect. In sending South Africa crashing to an innings defeat here inside four days, the leg-spinner's figures of six for 34 took him into the game's bowling élite, the 300 Test wickets club.

The wicket that made him the youngest man bar Kapil Dev to reach the mark — the Indian did it at 28 years and one day, beating Warne by 113 days — was that of the top scorer, Jacques Kallis, who was bowled by Warne's top-spinner at 6.40pm, having made a fighting 45 as the tourists struggled towards 113. By that time the Sydney Cricket Ground's lights were on, because play had been stopped by rain for more than three hours.

South Africa's batting was undeniably inept, after they had made an intensely frustrating start to the day by taking 45 minutes to claim the final Australian wicket.

Mark Taylor predictably brought Warne on after only 11 overs, and after an over warming up he had Hansie Cronje gingerly pushing forward, to be superbly caught at short leg by Ricky Ponting.

Herschelle Gibbs had made a half-century in the first innings, but this time he managed only one run in half an hour. He went to Warne's dipping, low full toss, prodding it towards midwicket, where Greg Blewett athletically took the catch one-handed.

Brian McMillan, who came out bristling with aggressive intent, was bowled round his legs by Warne, coming from over the wicket. Three balls later, Dave Richardson played the tired shot of a man nearing the end of his Test career and Warne, accepting an easy return catch, could hardly believe his luck.

Kallis meanwhile was showing the rest of the top order what might have been. Persistently sweeping Warne, and getting well forward or right back, he looked fairly comfortable. Only when Warne came round the wicket did Kallis succumb.

After completing his fourth 10-wicket Test haul Warne rated his bowling here as "right up there" with his best performances. "Loop and turn were there today and the wicket helped me," he said. "It was pretty emotional getting to 300 although I'm not really a stats man."

South Africa 287 (Warne 5-75) and 113 (Warne 6-34); Australia 421 (M Waugh 100). Australia won by an innings and 21 runs

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

It's Sir Tom at last

TOM FINNEY, the former England and Preston star who hung up his footballing boots 37 years ago, is the only sporting knight in the 1998 New Year Honours List. Finney, now 75, enjoyed an illustrious career spanning 22 years with the Lancashire club.

He made 76 appearances for England and scored 30 goals. In his glory days, Finney and England team-mate Stanley Matthews were rated the finest wingers in the world. To supplement his income, Finney ran a plumbing business, but money cannot buy the distinction he now shares with Matthews, Alf Ramsey, Matt Busby and Bobby Charlton. "Knights are few and far between in football," he said. "You couldn't have a bigger honour. I'm thrilled to bits."

Other footballers to be honoured were Wales and Chelsea striker Mark Hughes, and Scotland goalkeeper Jim Leighton, who were made MBEs, as were Dario Gradi, manager of Crewe Alexandra, and Robert Dinnie, a talent scout who, among others, spotted Kenny Dalglish as an 11-year-old.

Jack Rowell, England's former Rugby Union coach, was honoured with an OBE, as was the British Lions captain Martin Johnson, who led his team to the 2-1 Test series success in South Africa last year.



Finney celebrates in style

Double Grand National-winning trainer Jenny Pitman was awarded an OBE for her services to horse racing as were former Olympic javelin champion Tessa Sanderson, golfer Vivien Saunders, and Jennifer Cardwell, manager of the Great Britain women's hockey team. Karl Fogarty, twice world superbike champion, received an MBE as did former Surrey and England fast bowler Alf Gover and Peter Goss, one of Britain's most experienced racing sailors. Also honoured were Lilian McGurk (netball, MBE), Terry Denison (swimming, MBE) and Graeme Simmers, chairman of the Scottish Sports Council (CBE).

ENGLAND'S cricketers left for their winter tour of the West Indies, with Mike Atherton firmly in control for both the Test series and the five one-day internationals to follow. England's trio of selectors opted for Atherton as captain for the one-day games, cold-shouldering Adam Hollioake, who successfully led England to the Champions Trophy in Sharjah last month. From the specialist squad of 14 who came home victorious from the Gulf, only Alistair Brown of Surrey and Lancashire's Peter Martin will miss the trip to the Caribbean in March.

AUSTRALIA'S women cricketers captured their fourth World Cup after defeating New Zealand by five wickets in the 50-over-a-side game in Calcutta. Batting first after winning the toss, New Zealand were all out for a modest 164. Debbie Hockley, who made 79 from 123 balls, held the innings together but failed to find support from her partners, only two of whom managed to reach double figures. Belinda Clark and Joanne Broadbent got Australia off to a solid start. Clark was out in the 33rd over after hitting 52 from 82 balls. The Australians reached their victory target in comfortable fashion, with 14 balls to spare.

New Zealand will host the next World Cup in 2000, the International Women's Cricket Council decided in Calcutta, where they also admitted Pakistan and Sri Lanka as full members.

JON BROWN battled through gales, rain and mud to retain the County Durham international cross-country title at Aykley Head — the first athlete to win the 9.3km event twice. Brown, born in Bridgend, educated at Sheffield and now living in Vancouver, came home in 31min 32sec, ahead of France's Yann Millon (31.54) and Kenyan Thomas Nyariki (32.13).

Brown, who beat 5,000-metre world champion Daniel Komen at last year's event, said: "I couldn't have asked for a better start to the season. I've done little training since the Chicago marathon in October. I came here a little unsure." Catherine McKiernan, from Ireland, scored a runaway victory in the 5.2km women's race, covering the distance in 20.04.

HELEN WILLS MOODY, who dominated women's tennis in the late twenties and thirties and was generally regarded as one of the greatest players of all time, has died in California at the age of 92. In 1928 and 1929, Wills Moody was the Wimbledon, United States and French singles champion. From 1927 to 1933, she won 158 consecutive singles matches without losing a set. The famously aloof Californian won the Wimbledon singles title eight times between 1927 and 1938, a record which remained unsurpassed until 1990 when it was beaten by Martina Navratilova.

COLIN Montgomerie, haunted by memories of Kiawah 1991, survived a counter-attack by Davis Love III in the Andersen Consulting World Championship of Golf to win $1 million last Sunday in Scottsdale, Arizona. The Scot was four up with four to play, as he had been four down with four to play against Mark Calcavecchia in the 1991 Ryder Cup when he ran into problems.

His win, on the last hole, over the US PGA champion meant that he had beaten Sam Torrance, Costantino Rocca, José Maria Olazábal, Ernie Els and Love to earn his big cheque. Afterwards he said: "That was a great game, but I couldn't get Kiawah out of my mind."